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# ‘Thou shalt... do the will of God’

Do New Testament ethics  
have anything to say today?

INAUGURAL SPEECH BY PROF. JAN VAN DER WATT

Radboud University Nijmegen



## INAUGURAL SPEECH

PROF. JAN VAN DER WATT



Can the New Testament be taken seriously in current ethical debates, having been written two thousand years ago in a totally different world and situation? This is often denied, even by many Christian ethicists. Contemporary studies of New Testament ethics, however, have developed beyond the traditional lists of injunctions.

It will be argued that ethical action is formed in a context that begins with a person or group's symbolic universe and continues through identity formation, value determination, and principles, finally leading to actions. A comprehensive anthropology is developed implicitly and explicitly in the New Testament, not limiting ethics to specific actions, but presenting the person as a whole as an ethical agent. New Testament ethics, when approached in this way, can contribute to debates on ethical issues, even today.

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‘THOU SHALT... DO THE WILL OF GOD’  
DO NEW TESTAMENT ETHICS HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY TODAY?



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**Do New Testament ethics have anything to say today?**

*A lecture delivered on taking up the Chair of Exegesis of the New Testament and Christian Source Texts in the Faculties of Theology and Religious Studies at Radboud University Nijmegen, on Thursday, September 16, 2010*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ethics is the air societies breathe. It sustains life and makes social interaction possible. 'Clean air' results in healthy societies, while dirty air can do serious harm. Since the ancient discussions between Socrates and the Sophists<sup>1</sup> the issue of what this 'clean air' is and where it comes from remains an enduring topic for discussion.

A fundamental question was – and still is – whether ethics is based on 'objective good' or whether all ethical systems remain subjective. The Sophists (i.e. Protagoras [485-c.410 BCE], Antiphon [480-411 BCE], and Thrasymachus [5<sup>th</sup> century BCE]) argued for the subjective nature of ethics, i.e. for ethical relativism. Their basic opinion was that what is good or right is a matter of social convention designed to make life tolerable within societies. Plato remarked about Protagoras: 'Whatever things seem just and fine to each city, are just and fine for that city, so long as it thinks them so'.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Protagoras stated that the foundations of an ethical system needed nothing from the gods or from any special metaphysical realm beyond the ordinary world of the senses' (Singer 2007: ad loc.). The famous argument by Herodotus illustrated the problem: he discusses the ethical problems that could result from the Greeks and the Persians adapting the same funeral practices – the Greeks cremated their corpses as part of their journey to the underworld, while the Persians found this practice abhorrent. If a common ethical system is the goal, this difference would result in serious conflict. Is there a right or wrong in this case and who is going to decide?

Socrates, Plato (428/27-348/47 BCE) and others, on the other hand, tried to make a case for the objective nature of ethics, trying to find objective anchors in virtue that can be known by the virtuous person, the power of reason or the good that is acknowledged by everybody, representing the 'objective nature of things' (Graham 2004: loc 209-216). Plato, as a student of Socrates, took over this idea of the objectivity of goodness, as well as the 'interwovenness' of being (knowing virtue) and doing (act virtuously). Plato's famous idea of the true world above that determines the shadowy world below also informed his ethical views. It's not the particular that is the point of orientation, but the (objective) 'general' that is common to all the particular cases. The question how one knows this general good is answered by claiming that it can be known through participation. Things, insofar as they are good, share in this notion of good that exists eternally and outside time and space.

**Excursus:** *Discussion on morals.* The discussion on morals is profiled as early as the time of Socrates in the Greek world and of course in the covenantal arrangements (Torah) in the Hebrew Scriptures (for instance, Ex 20-24; Deut 10-30). For our purposes the earlier Eastern evidence is excluded, as is the Gilgamesh Epic [approx. 2600 BCE], the laws of Hammurabi [approx. 1750 BCE] and others. Singer [2007: ad loc] mentions that what may be considered the first ethics textbooks are series of lists learned by Egyptian boys around 3000 BCE. Socrates reflected

philosophically on life orientation and his question: 'how ought a man to live?' could be seen as the central question of ancient Greek ethics as a whole (see Plato *Gor.* 550c; *Rep.* 344c; 352, 618). He therefore tried to establish the objectivity and absoluteness of values in light of *eudaimonia*, a good and successful life amidst the difficulties and evil in this world (Degenaar 1984:28). Aristotle (*Eth. Nic.* 1.3.1095ab; 2.1.1103b27–29) argued that studying human behavior forms part of practical knowledge, enabling a person to choose the appropriate actions (for himself and his community) in specific situations on the basis of reasoned deliberation. Plato's approach to ideas also culminates in his views on what is good and aesthetically acceptable (Dreyer 1975:31). A characteristic of these philosophers was that they were not so much worried about guidelines for individual actions in specific situations, but rather focused on the highest goals individuals should strive for and the ideal type of person they should try to become in order to live a happy and virtuous life.<sup>3</sup> Later philosophers (like Stoics or Epicureans) identified passions and false desires as culprits in living moral lives and therefore tried to develop moral character through philosophy, promoting lives of self-control (Malherbe 1986:31). In the argumentation of the philosophers the influence of the cosmic reality plays an important role. (Later philosophers such as Kant shifted the emphasis to the rational will of the individual [see Bach 1975:66–72]). It is clear that in Greek philosophy the emphasis also shifted according to needs and aims. In the Hebrew context the emphasis was on behavior within a covenantal relationship. By default the relationship is determined by the divine figure, God. Not human logic but divine will determines the value system generated on the basis of the covenantal relationship. The covenantal relationship requires full devotion to God and obedience to God's commandments (Isa 1:12–17; Mic 6:8 – see Perkens 1992:652). In essence as well as structure, such a way of approaching the issue of moral values differs from the deliberate reasoning on values typical of the Greco-Roman approaches. A common denominator lies in the existence of a law(s) underlying the identity and existence of a community. In this sense law(s) express the opinion of the community as to the desires of the community pertaining what is good or bad with the implication that it should determine the behavior of the individual members of that community (see Perkens 1992:652). However, the establishment of and motivation behind the law differ dramatically. In the one case the seat of decision as to the content of the law lies with the individual (or community) while in the other case it lies with God. This leads to differences in motivation and reasons for following the law. The resulting behavior should therefore also be viewed differently (for instance, in the covenantal case it is the expression of a relationship based on gratitude). Breaking the law in the Hebrew context implies breaking the covenantal relationship, which deserves punishment and requires repentance.

This is not the case in the philosophic traditions in which individual reason is of central importance. In some cases the motivation for being virtuous was based on the idea of becoming like God, as this quote from Musonius Rufus (*Fr.* 17) illustrates: 'Therefore as God, through the possession of these virtues, is unconquered by pleasure or greed; is superior to desire or envy, and jealousy; is high-minded, beneficent and kindly (for such is our conception of God), so also a human being in the image of Him, when living in accord with nature, should be thought of as being like Him, and being like Him, being enviable; and, being enviable, he would forthwith be happy, for we envy none but the happy'. Stated broadly, the philosopher calls individuals back to duty and virtue as it is defined by them. The centrality of controlling one's passions and reason is evident from the following quote from Epictetus (approx. 55-135 CE; *Diss.* 4.4.33) on freedom: 'And how shall I free myself? – Have you not heard many times that you ought to eradicate desire utterly; direct your aversion to things that lie within the sphere of the moral purpose, and those only; that you ought to give up everything, your body, your property, your reputation, your books, turmoil from office, freedom from office? For if once you swerve aside from your course, you are a slave, you are a subject'. The Hebrew prophets, on the other hand, call people back to their covenantal relationship to God. As can be expected after centuries of living together during the Hellenistic period, there were mutual influences as can be seen in the works of, for instance, Philo (see, for instance, *Vita Mos.* 1.48; 75–76; *Praem* 24–56, or the *Wisdom of Solomon*. Another reaction was that of withdrawal, as was evident from the Qumran writings that position the law and moral demands within an apocalyptic framework). In this sense awareness of the differences helps the interpreter understand the value systems in the authors from the Hellenistic period.<sup>4</sup>

This debate about the tension between objectivity and subjectivity (relativism) on an ethical level still takes center stage today: in Western orientated debates the scale seems to be tipped in the direction of the subjective nature of ethics. Singer (2007:ad loc) calls the search for an 'objective, or rationally justifiable, ethics' – a search for what is in fact an illusion: 'no moral principle can be valid except in the societies in which it is held'. It is realized that people differ in their opinions about what they believe to be right or wrong and it is not really possible to prove the superiority of one set of ethical ideas over another with any degree of objectivity (Graham 2004:loc 194-201). It is argued that there is a basic difference between what can be called 'facts' in natural sciences and so-called 'moral facts', which cannot be determined objectively, but is essentially based on personal or societal opinions. As Graham (2004:loc 201-209) says, '...ethical argument is a matter of rhetoric, which is to say, of persuading people to believe rather than proving to them that the beliefs you hold are true'. The majority opinion seems to favor the idea that ethics are essentially subjective in nature, although there

are some opinions that lean towards the objective, including certain ideas underlying the human rights movements. It is, for instance, sometimes argued that everybody will absolutely and objectively be against rape or murder, which then supposedly makes these 'objective truths'. This is, however, not the case.

Let me give two examples: The Venda tribe in the north of South Africa until recently still forced a number of young girls to walk into the Vundutzi Lake, which is filled with crocodiles. This practice was ended by the state several decades ago, regarding it as murder. The Venda people disagreed. They knew the girls would be killed, but there was a reason: the rain god dwells in the lake and will only trade rain for the lives of these girls, as was clear from an ancient Venda myth.<sup>5</sup> By doing this, the future of the tribe and their crops was secured; the lives of the girls were traded for peace, hope and the well-being of the tribe. In this context giving up their lives seemed necessary.

What about rape? A while ago the world was shocked when 14 men raped a young girl in Africa. The group of men did not feel the same. The 14 young men had AIDS and, according to their beliefs, the symbolic action of having sex with a healthy girl would alert the spirits and encourage them to heal them. What is more important to the tribe? 14 men who hope to get healthy again or the virginity of one girl?

Two things need to be said: I) within different ethical systems judgment is made differently and opinions are motivated differently, each time in their own way based on their ethical presuppositions – a sort of ethical relativism; II) the socio-historical framework within which actions take place co-determine the significance and meaning of ethical actions. Actions are never as simple as they seem, on the contrary.

How should we conduct this debate where opinions differ to the extent that they do and different opinions seem to elude objective proof? One essential way of dealing with this problem is to 'level the fields', which means to openly and frankly analyze different ethical systems in order to try to understand them for what they are, even before considering them in terms of one another. To understand behavior, where it comes from and what drives particular actions in each case will provide us with the information needed to compare them in a motivated way, finding similarities and differences on the basis of which discussions could continue. Clear and cogent reasoning within the context of debate is needed as a point of departure. Understanding in dialogue is more important than convincing or seeking to prove superiority. If there is a lack of objectivity in this process, one will have to settle for inter-subjectivity: creating a space for open, inter-subjective, rational, controllable discussions in which different opinions can be explored for the sake of greater understanding.

This brings us to an important insight, namely, that ethics focus on action but involve more than mere action. One cannot simply focus on actions alone.<sup>6</sup> The essential focus of ethics indeed is actions or behavior; but ethics are also interested in what motivates and guides behavior. Courses of conduct are suggested, but also motivated as part of social systems. In the case of the Venda tribe sacrificing the young girls we saw

that the action is both motivated by a myth (i.e. it is tradition and historically motivated) and driven by purpose, namely, to ensure hope for rain and good crops and in this way ensure peace in the future. It seems unavoidable that both the motivation and the purpose should form part of ethical considerations. This was indeed the case from the beginning of Western ethical thought. The ancient philosophers, when discussing ethics, were concerned with more than mere actions; they were also concerned with striving for the good, achieving happiness, contentment, being virtuous, seeking *eudaimonia* (εὐδαιμονία), etc. Aristotle, for instance, places great emphasis on the use of rationality within these spheres and sees good human functioning as good exercise of reason. The whole process of playing the game of life well (*Lebenskunst*) did not only focus on lists of what one ought and ought not to do, but also on an integrated process in which motivation, action and achievement formed part of the same ethical process.

Do New Testament ethics have a place in this rather comprehensive debate today? Obviously. The role allocated to the New Testament by different people may differ, especially in a secularized society, but no one can deny that it has a significant place, especially in Western culture. Broadly speaking, it is significant for understanding the socio-cultural dynamics of present-day Western societies. It is of importance for the heuristic dynamics of our culture and society and still provides raw material for ethical argumentation even for people who do not subscribe to the basic message or authority of the New Testament. In a narrower sense it serves as the authoritative basis for people who call themselves Christians and wish to stand within this line of tradition. The focus on the Bible as a source of revelation (*sola Scriptura*) among the Protestants and the seamless link between Scripture and tradition in the Roman Catholic tradition confirms the significance of the New Testament for present-day discussions. The books the current Pope writes on Biblical themes highlight interest in the Bible, even from the center of Rome. It would also be difficult and even a mistake to argue that the focus on the Bible is of passing interest. Christianity is currently growing faster than ever, with over two billion members – not in traditionally Western countries, but in Africa, Asia and South America. The Western academic tradition should not overlook this phenomenon and should include it in the global discussion. In this discussion the New Testament will remain of importance and even gain in importance, since the debate on ethical issues in the areas mentioned are of the utmost importance. The fact that local current ethical views in these areas do not always correspond with the views advocated in the Bible is good reason for discussions about the way biblical material should be integrated with local beliefs.

Let us now turn to the specific issue of New Testament ethics and its contribution to the wider discussion, also within the framework of Christian ethics. This is indeed a broad subject and one that cannot be discussed in detail here. One or two remarks should suffice for our argument. New Testament ethics are often perceived by many,

not excluding moral theologians, as a prescriptive discipline based on the ethical patterns found in the documents of the New Testament. Analytical categories such as virtue and vice lists, paraenesees, commands, example narratives, etc. are used to gather prescriptive material from the texts of the New Testament. It is thought that, in spite of current works on New Testament ethics such as those of Hays (1996), Meeks (1986a; 1986b; 1993; 1996), and Horrell (2005), New Testament ethics suggest that these ethical patterns of the New Testament should be (slavishly) repeated or followed in current societies in order to be Biblically Christian. This restrictive approach is no longer favored in New Testament ethics.

The problem of using such restrictive analytical categories (paraenesees, virtue and vice lists, etc.) is aptly illustrated in the history of research of Johannine ethics. As Matera (1996:92) contends, 'For anyone interested in the study of New Testament ethics, the Gospel according to John is a major challenge...there are remarkably few references to moral conduct...' Theobald (2002:565) expresses similar sentiments by saying that 'Ein *ethisches* Interesse an der Gestaltung der Lebensbereiche der Gemeinde wird im Buch nirgends greifbar'. It becomes evident in 'einer gewaltigen Reduktion ethischer Fragen und Aussagen' (Wendland 1975:109) in the Gospel according to John.<sup>7</sup> Schrage (1988:297) even says that 'we may ask whether a chapter on the Johannine writings even belongs in a book on the ethics of the New Testament'; there is a basic absence of concrete indicators and paraenetical<sup>8</sup> guidelines.<sup>9</sup> Meeks contends that one should not – and could not – speak of ethics in John's Gospel. Rather, he chooses to approach the Gospel simply as an 'instrument for moral formation' (Meeks 1996:317; 1986b:3-11). This restrictive approach resulted in a situation in which there was virtually no discussion on ethics in the Johannine literature.<sup>10</sup>

Secondly, the hermeneutic problems of applying biblical material to our current situation are well known. The gap of nearly 2000 years between the origin of the texts of the New Testament and our current situation creates major difficulties for the current application of Biblical material. We cannot today live as first century people – our worlds are too far apart. We do not marry as they did, do not organize our households or friendships the way they did; our social care systems are not like theirs, and so on. To simply apply rules of a particular social system to another system violates both systems. Rules for behavior function within particular systems in which they find their meaning and purpose and they should be understood that way.

People responded differently to the implications of the gap between the social worlds of the first century Christians and ours today, ranging from a fundamentalist insistence that the prescriptions of the Bible should be applied directly to our situations today to an approach that the Bible, as an old book, is basically irrelevant to our ethical discussions today, even as Christians: Christian ethics can do without Biblical involvement. Within this wide spectrum of ideas it should be considered what the role of New Testament ethics should or could be.

Present-day New Testament ethics is moving beyond exploring the texts in order to find a list of prescriptions that should be applied: the ought's and ought not's. Two questions are going to be addressed to illustrate some of the new avenues explored in New Testament ethics with the purpose of making the New Testament material more transparent and easier to access in the debate not only with systematic and moral theologians – and note, also with those who ironically says that New Testament ethics can contribute nothing to Christian ethics – but also in the context of the wider discussion of how ethics should function in communities. The first question deals with the structural frame within which actions are formed. The second focuses on analytical categories used for analyzing the texts of the New Testament, exploring the direct and indirect ways in which ethical material is dealt with in these documents.

**Excursus<sup>11</sup>:** *Ethics, ethos and morals*<sup>12</sup>

Terms such as ethics, ethos and morals/morality are often used synonymously or at least interchangeably.<sup>13</sup> Certain distinctions need to be made here. It is important to note that all three terms are 'meta' terms or terms of 'second order' (Meeks 1993:4; Zimmermann 2009).

'Ethics'<sup>14</sup> as a term refers to *reflection* on the above process with emphasis on the nature, rationale and content of the prescriptive part.<sup>15</sup> Keck (1974:440) defines *ethic* as 'the systematic reflection on the nature of the good or the right'.<sup>16</sup> It reflects on the 'prescriptions' themselves as well as the rationale and justification for those 'prescriptions'. It is therefore the conscious (and unconscious/intuitive) contemplation on behavior and what causes and motivates behavior. In this sense ethics reflects the norms, values and eventually the identity of a particular group.<sup>17</sup> Ethics is not part of the behavior it considers (although it is a contemplative act) but is about behavior.<sup>18</sup> Because of this systematic contemplation a system results; 'ethical' then refers to correspondence to or consistency with this system.<sup>19</sup>

'Morals' refers to the set of 'prescriptions'<sup>20</sup> (within a particular group) that should guide an individual to shape his everyday life in a good and beneficial way. These prescriptions resulted from the systematic contemplation on the behavior of and within the group the individual belongs to. It needs, however, not be fully thought through and can include, according to Meeks (1993:4) 'a pervasive, and often, only partly conscious set of value-laden dispositions, inclinations, attitudes, and habits'. This is an anthropological given, since such systems are found in all societies and for the most part find their legitimacy in tradition. After the behavior and actions of a group (or individual for that matter) were contemplated, a set of 'prescriptions' could be drawn up that applies to that group – 'morals' refer to

part of the result of ethical reflection.<sup>21</sup> 'Morals' refer to a systematic exposition of what a group regards as right or wrong, good or bad and how people ought to behave.<sup>22</sup> Morals are also not behavior, but about behavior.

The term *ethos* is not so often used as the terms used above.<sup>23</sup> This leads Schmeller (2001:133) to remark: 'Das ntl. Ethos ist ein Feld, dessen Erforschung (im Unterscheid zur Ethik) noch in den Anfängen steckt'. Broadly speaking *ethos* is regarded as the practical expression of the rules by a particular group (or individual) and is therefore a behavioral category. Preisker (1949)<sup>24</sup> sees *ethos* as intentionality that determines the ethics (240-241), while Keck (1974:490)<sup>25</sup> defined *ethos* as the 'life-style of a group or society' and in this way drew attention to the customary nature of *ethos*<sup>26</sup>. What individuals customarily do is based on their *interpretation* of the rules, expressing their understanding of their identity. *Ethos* therefore does not signify deviant behavior or impulsive behavior, but the type of behavior that will be generally accepted by the group; one could say, nearly without 'thinking about it' (it may indeed be conscious or unconscious). This is indeed what everybody in that particular group does.

The most significant recent work in this regard was done by Michael Wolter (2001, 2009), who introduced the analytical category of *ethos* to show that the Pauline ethic could be expressed in terms of a 'theologisch kohärenten Begründungszusammenhangs' (Wolter 2009:127). He (2009:127; 2001:61) defines *ethos* as 'einen Kanon von institutionalisierten<sup>27</sup> Handlungen, die innerhalb eines bestimmten sozialen Systems in Geltung stehen. Ihnen wird Verbindlichkeit zugeschrieben, weil allererst durch solche Handlungen eine bestimmte Gruppe als solche erkennbar und erfahrbar wird'. He (2009:128-132) then describes what he means under the following points<sup>28</sup>:

I) In a material sense the behavior of an *ethos* is fixed and does not constantly generate or need new decisions or motivation. They are direct, repeatable and cannot be exchanged.<sup>29</sup> In functional sense the aim of *ethos* is to express and illustrate the identity of a particular group. In this sense it objectifies identity. Wolter (2009: ad loc.) quotes Kluxen in this regard: 'Die Gesellschaft, welche der Mensch als seinen notwendigen Lebenshorizont weiß..., erwartet von ihren Mitgliedern die Konformatität zu diesem Ethos, und von eben diesen Mitgliedern wird diese Konformatität unmittelbar als sinnvoll erfahren'. Cognitive identity therefore is translated into ethical identity. The term *ethos* therefore draws attention to two important elements – the relationship between behavior and identity, and the fact that behavior becomes fixed.

II) Groups in any society must draw borders between them and other groups, but must also coexist with those groups. The behavior of each group must ideally



include 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' actions. Through exclusive actions, the group distinguishes itself from the surrounding groups. These actions serve as identity markers as well as boundary markers. Inclusive actions correspond with actions of surrounding groups and serve as a way of integrating the group into the society. Conversion, then, implies resocialisation and the acceptance of a new ethos.

Identity is formed by accepting and concretizing certain values, i.e. living out and expressing ethos.<sup>30</sup> The implication is that the actions of preserving and continuing in the value system forms a central prerequisite for guaranteeing the continuity as well as the identity of a particular group. This is a significant insight for considering the Johannine situation, since – as will be argued later – John makes use of values taken from the Jews (the Torah), values Jesus reinterprets, habitualised values (such as foot washing), and so on. Integrating and preserving these values in a plausible and convincing way is crucial for building and maintaining the identity of his group.

Wolter (2009:133-136) explains what difference the use of the analytical category of ethos makes in analyzing the material by saying that I) not only moral rules but a much wider variety of actions, inter alia institutionalized actions such as the observance of food laws, circumcision, observing feast and meals, are included in the analysis and II) a wide variety of contexts, including the ordinary everyday contexts as well as the unusual special contexts (such as religious feasts, etc.) may be considered.

## 2. WHERE DO ACTIONS COME FROM AND WHY?

First an important problem in dealing with ethics should be noted, namely, the use of terminology.<sup>31</sup> The terminology and analytical categories a person uses determine the way the relevant material will be analyzed as well as the results that will follow. One should be clear about the terminology used and the categories of analysis that are going to be applied.<sup>32</sup> Concepts such as ethics, morals, ethos, identity, 'who you are should be what you do' and so on are used in a wide variety of ways. It is not always clear what is meant by these terms and what should be included or excluded when these terms are used.<sup>33</sup> The different uses of analytical categories also complicate matters. Should one only use categories such as paraenesis, virtue and vice lists, exemplary stories, direct commands to identify and analyze ethical material, or does ethical material manifest itself in other ways too, which would then imply the use of additional analytical categories? This issue will be discussed in the second major section.

What follows is a brief structural description of a complex process.<sup>34</sup> The purpose of this description is to get some clarity with regards to the different aspects involved in describing ethically related issues. It should also help to define some of the terms that

are often used indiscriminately and for different meanings. It remains important that definitions should be accurate, relevant (see Berghenoltz and Gouws 2007:572-573) and comprehensive, and should reflect their interrelatedness.<sup>35</sup>

This will also enable us to get a more comprehensive view of what is involved in the process that leads up to moral actions and thus broaden the overall framework within which ethical matters could be analyzed and considered. The relevance of this description for analyzing ethics in a document such as the Gospel of John (from here on just 'John' is used to refer to the document as well as the author) will be illustrated with examples from John.

An overview of a structure of action formation could assist us in getting a balanced view of the ethical dynamics of a text and guide us in our theoretical application of analytical categories. Consider the following schematic presentation:

Worldview	Identity	Values	Norms/principles	Prescription:actions
leads to	expressed in	concretized in	prescribed in	
Organizing and relating the totality of objects in a person's personal universe	Conscious and accepted relative position in worldview	Expressing what is valuable based on identity	Expressing how values can be concretely realized	Prescribing actions based on norms or principles (see Figure 2)

Figure 1

Law	Rule	Command	Guideline	Advice	Request	Suggestion	Example
Fixed with a high level of authority and prescriptiveness	Fixed with a significant level of authority and prescriptiveness	Prescribed action (could be limited to time) with authority	Strongly recommended and expected for good results	Strongly recommended or suggested but not enforced	Indicate wish or preferred action	Indicate line of action for good results without authority or prescription	Action expected to be followed in parallel situations

Figure 2

a) Structured and dynamic worldview

People, when experiencing the world around them, form perceptions of the reality they are confronted with. There is a direct relationship between the mental impressions of their reality and their consequent behavior in that reality.<sup>36</sup> This process of mentally integrating impressions, processing them so that they help to make sense of the reality and then utilizing these perceptions again to determine actions is formally described in different ways.<sup>37</sup> For instance, within the framework of the sociology of knowledge Berger and Luckmann (1966)<sup>38</sup> provided a useful explanation of this process, using the concept of a *symbolic universe*.<sup>39</sup> Their insights have been used widely, including in New Testament research. In spite of some criticisms, it still remains valuable. Other cognitive and related theories have also been developed.<sup>40</sup> Terminology, however, has proven to be a problem; different terms<sup>41</sup> are used in different ways, for instance, *symbolic universe* is used so often and with so many different nuances, that using that term might lead to confusion rather than clarification.

In an effort to be as clear as possible,<sup>42</sup> the following terms will be used in the following senses:

- The term *worldview*<sup>43</sup> will be used to designate the total structured and dynamic<sup>44</sup> mental world ('universe' in Berger and Luckmann's sense) of a person, including the totality of his or her experience of reality (note that when the word *worldview* is used it refers to the description that is given here).<sup>45</sup> A particular worldview is continually constructed as a person discovers reality and relates it to what s/he already knows – in that sense it remains individual.
- The phrase *mental world* will be used to indicate the inclusive mental reality that constitutes a particular person's worldview. In many cases it will be synonymous with worldview.
- The phrase *connotative images* will be used to refer to the totality of the objects, actions and abstracts that form part of the worldview of a person ('symbols' in Berger and Luckmann's sense). These are called 'images' because in observing, for instance, a church, the image that remains has connotations – it is a good place, you can worship there, etc. This forms an image – an object with a cluster of connotations that are activated when you think of church. Meaning, association and connotation are linked to the object.

Worldviews can be and are shared by groups with similar outlooks. A child's discovery of reality takes place on the knee of parents and grandparents (involving tradition, cultural practices, value judgments, etc) and this will inevitably result in overlaps in their mental worlds (see Berger and Luckmann 1966:ad loc). This is also how groups are constituted – conversion means accepting and sharing the new groups' 'mental world'.

If the structure of a person's worldview overlaps more or less with somebody else's, they will share identity to the extent that their mental worlds and their evaluations of their relative positions within their mental worlds overlap. In John's Gospel a worldview in which God and his Agent, Jesus, are the points of orientation is presented and people are invited to accept that worldview and exist within the confines of that worldview (John 20:30-31; 6:28). A person challenged in this way enters into a process in which the views of the alternative worldview that is on offer are confirmed, extended, modified, rejected, etc. By doing that, his or her position in the group will be defined/redefined accordingly. As mental worlds overlap, so identities overlap. In this way tradition (a dominant mental world) is mediated – it is a dynamic cultural phenomenon, i.e. it is culturally constituted and culturally constitutive. For example, a child is born within such a group-orientated society and learns that group alliance as 'connotative image' is paramount. Part of this alliance is acceptance of the way in which this group organizes the 'connotative images' within their shared mental world. The connotative

images that are important to the group would then automatically become important to this young member of the group, forming his or her worldview; thus he or she will share in the identity of that group.

The relative positions of the different connotative images within the worldview are usually steady but not fixed; they are part of a dynamic process in which changes can and indeed do take place. The degree of change, including confirmation, reorganization, reconstruction or even rejection may range from a minor (an object is re-evaluated, loses or gains in importance, etc.) to a major shift, in which the total mental world of connotative images is rearranged (a paradigm shift, which is often linked to conversion). In cases where an individual associates him or herself with a group and shares the basic organization of objects in their mental world, changes may be more difficult (bound to tradition in other words), and may have implications for the person's affiliation with that particular group.<sup>46</sup>

Connotative images refer to the totality of a person's structured perceptions of his or her reality. Within this total view of that person's perceived reality the 'connotative images' are organized a) in *relation* to each other and b) *hierarchically*. The different connotative images existing in the reality of a particular person are ordered in a hierarchy of importance and this influence, even more, determines his views and eventually his actions when confronted with a particular situation within the world. For instance, if the connotative image 'God' has a hierarchically high or dominant place in the mental world of connotative images, and 'money' a low place, choices will be made for God rather than money, whenever these two are opposed in any decision. In decisions and actions money will also be made subservient to matters pertaining to God. If money is placed higher in the hierarchy than God, the actions and choices will be the opposite. This implies that to understand the worldview of a person, the relative positions of the connotative images should be carefully noted. The motivation, not only of the identity of individuals, but also for their values up to their deeds, may be found in this relative organization of connotative images.

Without going into any detail, it should be mentioned that the structuring and interrelating of the connotative images within the mental world *inter alia* takes place under the influence of faith (what is believed in), convention (what your significant others tell you, i.e. tradition<sup>47</sup>), reason (what sounds right) or experience (what experience has taught a person).<sup>48</sup> The mental world could be changed on the basis of any of these influences. By simply mentioning these influences it already becomes clear that this is an extraordinarily complex process that cannot be discussed in detail here.

It should also be noted that the worldview has 'spatial depth', which is activated through different environments in which a person finds him or herself. Different situations may locate the person in different positions within his or her mental world. The connotations he or she gives to images remain the same, but the position relative to the images may shift depending on the situation. For instance, if a person is in

church, money will be seen in a different way than when bargaining for a business contract or when asked to pay tax. One cannot expect the person sitting in church to make the same decision about money he would make in tough business negotiations, since relative (spatial) positions within the mental world differ and different connotative images are interrelated at that particular point leading to a different evaluation and action. The interaction between the types of image relative to each other – and the person whose mental world it is – remains a dynamic process. The relative position changes and therefore the evaluation of the connotative value attributed to money. The connotation related to money (i.e. the connotative image) does not change, but it is a recognition that the relative positions within the mental world change. It is a matter of *highlighting* – certain images in the mental world are highlighted in their interrelationship in a specific situation. Within this interrelatedness and, bearing in mind the hierarchy within the different activated connotative perceptions, principles are formulated and actions follow. What you put in and what you leave out in the process of consideration is of the utmost importance in forming the action.

Taking a different relative position within the mental world, viewing the connotative images from a different perspective may result in different evaluations or results (i.e. second opinions or different perspectives). This becomes a dynamic process that constantly allows a person to deal with new situations. Say we have the principle of telling the truth/not lying as a central principle. If a child steals money from his mother's purse and he is confronted by her, he should acknowledge that he took it if he wants to comply with that principle. He should tell the truth. But, in a situation where a person hides a refugee from people who want to kill that person, and is then confronted with the question of where the person is, it is different matter whether he should tell the truth. The difference lies in the different 'spatial' or relative positions a person takes in these different situations. Different connotative images (mother/child vs. murderer/victim) inform the two different situations which lead to different evaluations. Not only the perception of truth plays a part, but sacrificing life, collaborating with bad people, responsibility for trust put in you, the consequences of previous commitments, etc. all start to play an interrelated role in formulating your opinion as to the prescribed action to be taken. This is why people differ on issues. They combine the interrelationship between these different connotative images in different ways and give different weight to the different connotative images. In the end it is the mixture and combination of these different connotative images that will lead to choosing one value as being dominant or perhaps two, which then leads to a sort of compromise situation.

#### *b) Identity as a position in a mental world of connotative images*

The term *identity* is widely used in human sciences (for instance, psychology, sociology, anthropology, religion, gender studies, etc.) in a variety of ways and according to a

number of definitions.<sup>49</sup> It is indeed a difficult concept to define (Brubaker and Cooper 2000:1-6) and in some cases there is even doubt whether it could be pinned down accurately (see Dupont 2010:14ff.). Again it is necessary to be more precise about what is meant here, since the word 'identity' is central to the discussion of ethics and is used in relation to worldview and other related concepts.

The term identity<sup>50</sup> is used here taking two aspects (see also Ricoeur and Blamey 1995) into consideration, namely, the way a particular person conceptualizes and expresses him or herself in terms of and as part of a mental world (self-perception),<sup>51</sup> and secondly, the way the individual with his identity is conceptualized and defined in terms of relationships and affiliations with others,<sup>52</sup> influencing their relative position in the world. From this vantage point reality is accommodated and meaningfulness is sought.

A person consciously defines him or herself in terms of a worldview, but is also part of that worldview through self-perception (a person's mental image of him or herself, also expressing uniqueness and individuality as part of that mental world). Since this is a self-conscious process within which a person relates and positions him or herself in relation to other connotative images (i.e. family, sport, money, work, etc.) within the mental world, it results in acknowledging the relative role and significance of the other connotative images in terms of self-perception. Within this process identity is continuously being formed. As Horrell (2005:94) puts it: identity 'is constructed, not given, produced and reproduced not fixed... social identity is constantly in process, as it were, reinforced or transformed over time...'. In spite of the constant dynamics in the formation of identity, the identity of a person in any case ensures stability and continuity in the self-perception of the person, also in relationships with others. Within this framework the notion of identity negotiation plays a role in which the individual consciously negotiates an individual position in relation to his or her own – and other – worldviews.

Deviant behavior or thinking is normally resisted in these contexts (as is evident in the opponents of Jesus in John). As Horrell (2005:94) says: 'People may, of course, choose to leave the group, or redefine its basis and criteria for membership in ways which a leader regards as "beyond the pale", as compromising the very identity of the group. Alternatively, someone's conduct may be so contrary to the norms of the group that s/he will be deemed no longer to share the common group identity, and will be recategorized as an outsider'. John's Gospel originated in a crisis situation in which the Johannine group had to define themselves over and against the more numerous and powerful 'Jewish group' of opponents. As can be expected the description of identity formation in the Gospel and Letters are explicit.

Identity cannot be understood outside its relationship to the worldview of a person and in the same way it determines the rest of the process<sup>53</sup> within the continuum to be described.<sup>54</sup> Identity is virtual and cannot be empirically described – it is only

discoverable in its expressions in words and deeds, i.e. in formulating values, or principles, which also form part of the continuum of action formation.

*c) Values as an expression of identity within the mental world of connotative images*

Values in this context refer neither to rules, norms or actions.<sup>55</sup> Values, as understood here, are the formulation of what is important or valuable to a person, based on a mental world of connotative images. Values formulate the connotative images that are held dear and are regarded as valuable and which normatively orientate an individual towards behavior that is positively desirable, i.e. 'ought to be' and which are internalized by a group to which the individual belongs.<sup>56</sup> Values express fixed preferences, based on what is regarded as important within the framework of a particular worldview. The way values are formulated expresses identity, indicating which 'connotative images' are important or valuable and values will serve as points of orientation when a person starts to express him or herself in words or actions. Kluckhohn (1960:117) defines values as follows: it is '...a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means, and ends of action'. Values are based on an expression of an individual's identity. It is necessary to draw qualitative distinctions if one seeks to answer fundamental moral questions, in other words, values must be formulated.<sup>57</sup> These will then account for our moral actions and responses in concrete circumstances (see also Taylor 1989:15f.). Commitment to some set of qualitative distinctions that would orientate and direct us in our moral space should be taken in to account. Knowledge, whether explicit or implicit, of this (structured) set will guide our moral experience. It forms a framework or perhaps overlapping frameworks that help us to distinguish between good and bad.

In this sense moral behavior concretely begins with the formulation of values, since values provide an indication of what a person cherishes and what not, what is right or wrong, or what is good or evil. It is a matter of value judgments that are expressed. Actions like bending your finger would normally not fall under moral behavior, since there is no value attached to that, except if it is for instance to pull the trigger of a gun to kill children. This was already emphasized by philosophers such as the Stoics.

Values can only be experienced, identified, and known through behavior<sup>58</sup> or alternatively, when described and expounded in language (speech, lists, etc.) – this is the visible side of values or norms. Values are expressed in action/description and through action/description values are known.

**Excursus:** *Values considered:* Thomas and Znaniecki (1927) were among the initial anthropologists who reflected on the concept of values within a community (see also Van der Merwe 2008:361). In their reflection they distinguished between objects (which were the values) and the attitude (of the individual). In their

distinction 'objects' (= community values or rules) had objective status (31-32). These rules produced attitudes and in this way the individual was linked to his or her society. Values were therefore, according to them, objective societal and cultural phenomena, while attitudes were psychological and individual. Although they formulated the problem of the relationship between community values and the individual, they did not succeed in adequately describing the individual's treatment of values. Faris (1937:23-27) acknowledged the overarching significance of values as cultural phenomena, but drew attention to the subjective side by emphasizing the person and personality. The attitude of the individual or the community is an expression of the values of the community. The subjective side or personality is formed through interaction with experience and action within a particular community based on symbolic communication. The identity of a community is thus expressed in attitudes that becomes habitual (the ethos of the community according to Wolter 2001, 2009), also within the personalities of individuals in that group, giving specificity and substance to the overarching value system.

Coertze (1979:37) drew attention to the fact that values relating to what is good or bad are not objective norms that automatically form part of a community, but that the judgment, insight and knowledge of the ancestors played a part in formulating and establishing these values. This emphasizes the importance of the tradition within which a community stands, which also motivates and expresses identity. In the case of John the Jewish tradition is clearly the root from which the Johannine group emerged. The text frequently refers to the Jewish values that are taken up and cherished in the newly formed Johannine group. This forms part of their identity.

Kluckhohn (1960:403) introduces a concept which is more than simply a value, and can be systemically organized (411-415). The word used in this regard is '*value orientation*' – which means the orientation of an individual towards particular values or a particular value system that guide and inform his or her actions. According to the orientation towards particular values an individual expresses those values in behavior.

Sorokin (1948:11-16) pointed out that not all values function on the same level. He distinguished between ultimate and relative values, saying about ultimate values that: 'the ultimate nature of values is another term for what others call God' (255) and describes the idea of God 'as the ultimate true reality and the absolute true value' (230). Some values have a more central significance in a community than others. Subdivisions are therefore necessary. Values are ordered in a system within which there is a hierarchy.



The different values stay interrelated in spite of the hierarchical order. This need not be spelled out in full – one or two examples should suffice. For instance, it will be argued that in the case of John the central value of knowing and honoring God is firmly established as an overarching value. This is physically expressed through love which is another central value. On a lower level of hierarchy, but no less important, are values such as telling the truth or not retaliating when persecuted. These are expressions of love and ultimately of honoring God. This value structure that is internalized by a group should be properly described, also in the case of John, since value structures will differ among different groups.

*d) Principles/norms as bridge between values and actions*

The term principle or norm,<sup>59</sup> as used here,<sup>60</sup> refers to the broader guiding framework, fundamental assumptions or standards of behavior, that underlie as well as motivate actions (Burridge 2008:4-8).<sup>61</sup> The formulation of these principles is based on and expresses the ascribed values that reflect the identity of a person. Esler (2003:55) argues that norms 'constitute frames of reference, or signposts, through which the world can be interpreted' and against which concrete actions could be qualitatively judged. In this way they bring order and predictability to life and are indeed needed for the maintenance and enhancement of the identity of the group. Norms or principles are wider than and underlie the physical prescription of actions. The latter are rather a concrete expression of the former.

Principles do not spell out specific concrete actions, but serve as the guiding ethical framework of which the action must be an expression – principle and ensuing action must correlate. Let me give the following example: say the value is: God is important; the principle, expressing this value, might then be: honor God, meaning that actions should be sought that would fit the notion of honoring God. No concrete or specific actions are formulated yet, but an overarching guideline or general point of orientation for the ensuing actions is provided. To put it differently, the principle describes the result, motivation or goal of the action. If the action is complete, one should be able to say that the action expressed the principle. Chosen actions follow the principle and thus resonate with the value.

Principles are not actions. A principle usually needs to be formulated into concrete prescriptions that will lead to appropriate actions within a particular situation. Take the example of: 'Love one another'. This is apparently an imperative, but what is expected is not directly explained. Again this principle should be explored semantically: What is love? Does the 'one another' include everybody or only some people? etc. A principle stated as an imperative ('you should love') may ordinarily be distinguished from a command (rule) by the inability to do it 'directly' – a secondary step or question of 'how should it be done or applied' (a rule) follows.

The same principle may underlie different types of actions. For instance, honoring God may lead to specific cultic activities (prayer, sacrifice, etc.) or social behavior (helping others, not killing, etc.). Applying a principle requires reflection: the question of 'how should it be done or applied' is usually (implicitly or explicitly) asked and often the answers differ as to the concrete lines of action to follow. These reflections may be very complicated. For instance, if one asks: How should love be concretely expressed in this situation? What actions are required to express love? If one decides on an action, what is the relationship of that action to love? For instance, could punishment and love be related and how? Apart from the fact that the same principle might be applied to different situations with the result that the lines of action they suggest might differ accordingly. To take an example from John: in one case the honor of God might require a person to help and sustain life (John 15:8), while in another case the honor of God requires a person to remain ill or even die (John 11:4) or to be born blind (i.e. a loss of a part of what is understood as life in ancient times, namely, sight – 9:3-4).

Different principles may also overlap and usually do. For instance, say you have the principle of 'love'; but what is love? Add the principle of 'honoring God'. Now the expressions of love must also incorporate expressing honor to God. Immediately the actions expressing love are more defined and less general. Add the principle 'your loyalty first belongs to your fellow disciples' and the resulting actions are even more defined. This interrelatedness of principles creates a matrix within which actions are performed. The more principles there are, the more refined the ensuing actions would be. In describing this matrix, a definite picture of the value system represented would emerge. In describing a particular ethical system, for instance that of John, this interrelationship of principles would assist in mapping the nature and reasons for actions. The principles mentioned above, such as honoring God, love of God and your brother, creating life (in the broadest sense of the word), etc. are all principles found in the Johannine literature which provides a specific character to the ethical system of John.

A brief note must be made about the motivation for norms or principles. In discussions a broad distinction is often made between deontological and teleological motivations, distinguishing between juridical (what is right) and value (what is good) aspects of actions. Deontological approaches focus on the 'ought to' because it is a rule (obligation, duty, etc.) which is regarded as inherently right (often based on revelation by a god or God), irrespective of the good or bad generated,<sup>62</sup> while the teleological approaches look at the outcome and value of an applied rule (goodness, desirability) – the goodness or value that comes from an action as an end to be achieved has priority in deciding whether something is right or not. 'Goodness' is then defined in different ways, such as self-fulfillment, happiness, pleasure, etc., which will of course influence the nature of the actions<sup>63</sup>.

It focuses either on what is right or what is good. These two categories may overlap, but may also not overlap. This motivation of course originates within the mental image and the way it is organized.

*e) Prescriptions: specific actions expressed in laws, rules, commands, etc.*

How do you transform a particular principle into a concrete action?<sup>64</sup> As was argued above, principles do not prescribe specific concrete actions, but simply provide guidelines or points of orientation for particular actions in particular situations. This is where the prescriptive phase comes in. Prescriptions bridge the gap between principles and concrete actions – prescriptions indicate which actions ought to be performed to give proper expression to a particular principle (or set of principles).

The aim of prescriptions is basically to guide or inspire a group's or individual's actions and behavior in a desired direction, usually indicating what is good, right or acceptable. They are given in different ways and with different intensities and aims. Use might be made of commands, laws, rules, guidelines, examples, etc. Rhetorically these different terms function in different ways. They differ, for instance, in their directness, authority, or desired effect.

Prescriptions deal with what 'ought to be' and this implies desire and authority (a concept that will be used to differentiate between different terms), which means that the prescription is based on something that could be enforced on the person addressed by the prescription. In religious contexts it is usually the will of the divine figure (theological reason), while in philosophy reason and logic play a more prominent role. Other motivations may be relational (for the sake of group identity), teleological (moving to a defined end) or even pragmatic (usability/ functionality/ exploitability). In John the basic motivation and ground for determining all actions rest with God, the creator and the truth. Desirability is determined by him and is expressed through his will. His will is expressed and communicated through Jesus (1:18). The relational (being part of God's family) and teleological motivation (having eternal life) also play a role. The basic motivation lies with God, but, in addition, living eternal life and being part of the family of God, for instance, also motivate particular behavior.

Prescriptions may differ in nature and expectations ranging from a demand for absolute obedience to a simple suggestion that might be followed or not. This is a matter of rhetoric. What follows is a brief overview of some of the terminology found in ethical discussions.

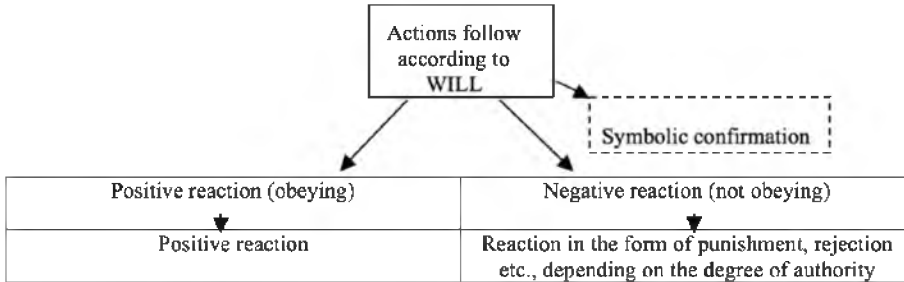
Some prescribed actions are binding (normally in an absolute way) and enforced by authority – there is an absolute obligation to obey and disobedience usually carries the risk of punishment. The term usually used in this regard is 'law', although in some cases the word 'rule' may also be used.<sup>65</sup> Then there are actions that are also binding, but not with the same intensity or on the same level as those just mentioned. If one

wants to participate in something or be part of a group, it is expected that one follow these prescriptions for proper behavior. The word '*rule*'<sup>66</sup> is usually used for these types of prescriptions.<sup>67</sup> Then there are *commands*<sup>68</sup> (or *orders*) that are more linked to a point in time and related to a particular situation than the above two, but are just as binding as they are and may even carry the same punishments as for breaking the law. The term '*guideline*'<sup>69</sup> refers to actions that are expected and strongly recommended for good results, but need not be followed to the letter and could often serve as a general indication of the direction in which one should plan actions. The terms '*advice*'<sup>70</sup> or '*suggestion*' refers to prescribed actions that are suggested or recommended, but not enforced. If these prescriptions are not followed for some or other reason people will not be punished, although their deviant actions might be questioned. The term '*request*' politely or courteously communicates a person's wish or preferred action to others in the hope that another person will follow or allow the action. No emphasis is placed on authority (obligation) or prescriptiveness – that depends on the situation and actors involved. Not obliging may have different effects, depending on the situation.

There are also indirect prescriptions that carry ethical weight and should not be overlooked when describing the ethical dynamics of a text, such as *questions* ('Are you not going to do this?'), *referred speech* ('When I was your age, I did this'), *examples*, where one event may be described as parallel to another, expecting the person in the second situation to adopt the same or at least similar behavior, and *paradigms* as systematizations of common moral actions. *Characterizations* may also be intended as ethical models for behavior (Burridge 2008:4-8). By way of comparison or analogy, the actions described in the characterization may be applied in current situations. Jesus helped people in need – I should also do that. Through this characterization a particular value system is concretized.

*f) Actions as expression of the person, based on his or her will*<sup>71</sup>

The purpose of the prescriptions is to influence actions.<sup>72</sup> This influence is influenced by the will of the person to oblige. Does s/he accept the prescription and put it into action or not? The reaction to a 'prescription' (the will to do) will, of course, result in a corresponding action. In this light one should distinguish between what ought to be done (what one should do), what one wants to do and what one indeed does.<sup>73</sup> If what you ought to do overlaps with what you want to do then the action is normally morally positive. If someone does not oblige, various forms of punishment by the group may result. The two poles of 'prescription' and 'reward/punishment' (implicit or explicit) are constantly in balance, depending on the authority behind the prescription. 'Prescriptions' can therefore not guarantee the outcome of actions – that is a completely different matter. The most 'prescriptions' can do is to a) create expectations that the prescription will be followed and b) implicitly warn about the consequences of not obliging. Thus, schematically:



Within the framework of the continuum it becomes clear that such a choice involves the whole continuum, since the prescription is linked to what the person regards as valuable and ultimately to his identity. Thus the will becomes an expression of a world-view and actions resulting from choices based on the will also reflect something of the totality of such a person's identity. A leading scholar on the moral philosophers, namely Malherbe, for instance, emphasizes that even with the ancient moral philosophers the main focus in moral behavior is not on actions (different groups may act similarly) but on the motivation for those actions (the reasons why as expressed in the continuum described above). Actions therefore express as well as confirm/deny the content of the continuum. A discrepancy between actions and the continuum indeed creates tension (deviant behavior/sin).

It is important to note that in spite of the whole continuum of action formation as described up to now, the will of the actor (consciously or unconsciously) plays a determining role in resulting actions. This of course leads to notions such as responsibility, guilt, etc. The dynamics of the will are often complex. In John there are external influences such as the devil that could influence and even overpower the individual will. On the other hand, the will of a person could be guided by the Spirit.

If the question is asked how analyzing the lines of actionlines of action in a narrative like John would help in understanding the dynamics of the ethics of that document, the answer lies in their contribution to an understanding of the whole process. An individual action is usually a single expression of an aspect of a larger ethical system. A whole series of actions, seen in structural unity, could suggest the presence of a particular value system. The more descriptions of actions that are 'available', the easier it would be to draw conclusions. If one has a series of actions, based on choices, one could interrelate them and draw conclusions as to the profile of the value system – the value system of course reflects the identity and worldview. For instance, if one finds the following actions such as not stealing or committing murder, honoring your parents and the sanctity of marriage, not giving false witness and keeping the Sabbath while honoring the only true God, in one document one might justifiably conclude that one is dealing

with a value system represented by the Decalogue. This confirms that one cannot just focus on the exhortatory sections or specific sections dealing with moral actions, but one must also consider the formation and identity description of the Johannine group.

Two matters still need to be considered, namely, the purpose and the symbolic nature of actions.

Why are particular actions performed? This is a crucial question that has formed a central point of discussion since the times of ancient philosophers. Actions reap rewards... you carry them out in order to achieve a particular outcome, be it happiness<sup>74</sup> (Stoics), virtue, pleasure (Epicureans), purpose in life, pleasing God (Jews and Christians), or whatever other reason. In investigating any ethical system the purpose of actions should be formulated, since it indicates a pillar within the value system of the actor. This makes it easier to understand the dynamics of the ethics as a whole. It helps to confirm and express the worldview/identity of the actor. Moral actions are therefore not neutral, but produce specific results that are sought according to the worldview. In John, for instance, the result will be to be satisfied that you have honored God by doing his will and thus experience the peace (14:27; 16:33) or joy (15:11; 16:24; 17:13) that Jesus gives you for being a good child within the family of God.

Then there are *symbolic* actions.<sup>75</sup> They function referentially: by performing a particular action, you refer (connotatively or emotionally) to other analogous actions. Symbolic actions usually recall and remind the participants of a system of relevant meaning that lies behind them. Because they draw the participants into a world of remembrance, they confirm certain historical positions. They, for instance, remind participants of their adherence to a particular group with a particular identity and particular responsibilities. This usually forms part of the *ethos*<sup>76</sup> of that particular group.

Washing one another's feet in John 13 is, for instance, such a symbolic action, which reminds the disciples of who their Lord and Teacher is and the example he set that must be followed by them. By obliging the person confirms his or her membership of the Johannine group, which means accepting and sharing the structure of the mental world of the group and therefore sharing its identity. The implication will be that an individual's values, norms, acceptance of laws and rules as well as projected actions will be in line with those of Jesus and the rest of the group.

By partaking in foot washing, the person also indicates what is to be expected in the future. The symbolic communication of the foot washing will be concretized in analogical actions in everyday actions towards this group of people. By way of analogy he will 'wash their feet' every day. As such the group may make a *constant* appeal to the person to act accordingly and thus this may function as a type of exemplary 'law'.<sup>77</sup>

By way of preliminary conclusion (final remarks will be made at the end): restricting analytical categories to virtue or vice lists, prescriptions, imperatives and the like is indeed problematic in light of the structure of action formation described above.

Actions are part of a much larger continuum and cannot be separated from what leads up to and influences them. In reflecting on the ethical dynamics, the whole continuum should be taken into consideration. This does not mean that everything becomes ethics, but it does imply that every part of the continuum has ethical dimensions – ethics is interwoven with other aspects of the theological message. An ethical discussion cannot really take place if the whole is not considered. Within the whole the particular (actions) make sense and gain meaning.

### 3. ETHICS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE STRUCTURE OF ACTION FORMATION

Some concrete examples will now be taken from the Gospel of John to illustrate the significance of the structure of action formation described above.

#### a) *The basic ethical action required by Jesus*

A major clue as to the essence of ethical actions in John is given in Chapter 6 in Jesus' discussion with the crowd Jesus fed (Ch. 6). After the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, the crowd approached Jesus as a Rabbi (6:25) with an *ethical* question (6:28 - τί ποιῶμεν ἵνα ἐργαζώμεθα τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ;) <sup>78</sup> about the required behavior to please God and receive eternal life. This is also the same question the rich young man asks in the Synoptic Gospels (Mk 10:17 par.) when he wants to know the way to eternal life.<sup>79</sup> The answer in the Synoptics focuses on the requirements of the Law. In John the focus of the answer shifts from the Law to the person of Jesus, as Jesus' subsequent reaction indicates (6:29 - τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ ἔργον τοῦ θεοῦ, ἵνα πιστεύητε εἰς ὃν ἀπέστειλεν ἐκεῖνος). The essential *deed* that is required is faith in Jesus. *Faith in Jesus* is therefore the first and most crucial action required to do the works of God. Without this deed of fully associating with Jesus (Van der Watt, 2005:119–122), people will stay in darkness (morally) and die in sin (3:17ff.; 8:21,24). Let's explore this remark of Jesus a bit more.

In 6:28 τί ποιῶμεν is used in an *absolute way*, inquiring about the nature and direction of behavior or actions, a phrase common in the New Testament (Mat 6:3; Mk 2:24; 10:17). As such the question is neutral, but it is directly qualified by the ἵνα clause, describing the aim or goal of the actions or behavior. What should the nature of their actions be in order to qualify them as 'being done as works of/for God'? (Schnackenburg 1980:39). This is an ethical question in its purest form.<sup>80</sup>

The phrase, namely, to 'perform/work'<sup>81</sup> the works of God,<sup>82</sup> (ἐργαζώμεθα τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ<sup>83</sup> τοῦ θεοῦ)<sup>84</sup> introduces a key concept in the following discussion and therefore needs closer attention. This phrase is found elsewhere in the LXX, Jewish literature (1QS 4:4; 1QH 5:36; *Damascus Rule* 1:1; 2:14; 13:7) as well as in the New Testament.<sup>85</sup> The most common use of this phrase is to refer to God who does certain things (God's actions – i.e. a subjective genitive; for an example in the Gospel itself see 9:3). Here in 6:28 it is better understood as *objective genitive* emphasizing the works people will do for

God, or paraphrased, to please God or because God requires it. It refers to their moral effort to act according to God's will.<sup>86</sup>

What did they have in mind when asking their question? Although views on the reference and meaning of τὰ ἔργα τοῦ θεοῦ vary, there is strong support for the view that the crowd had their traditional obedience to the law in mind. These were Jews in a Jewish context (they were expecting the Messiah king – 6:15 and such questions are found elsewhere in the NT in relation to the law – Mk. 10:17ff. *par.*) and a question about the 'im Gezeß festgelegten Gotteswillens', referring to the requirements of the Torah (Schenke 1998:131), would be natural and expected. Keener (2003:678) motivates the ethical interpretation of works in 6:28 by referring to similar ethical references in Jewish literature, i.e. Bar 2:9-10; CD 2:14-15 as well as some other ethical uses in John, i.e. 3:19-21; 7:7; 8:39,41. See also Rev 2:26; 12:17. (Köstenberger 2004:208; Haenchen 1980:320; Schenke 1998:131).

In his answer to the question of the crowd, Jesus reinterprets and redirects the understanding of the crowd. First, he changes the plural (τὰ ἔργα) to an emphatic singular (τὸ ἔργον): τοῦτό ἐστὶν τὸ ἔργον τοῦ θεοῦ. (Schnackenburg 1980:39). This shifts the focus from several required deeds to a single action, signaling a movement away from rules (several ethical requirements) to a single action. This 'work of God' is then qualified by a ἵνα phrase: believe<sup>87</sup> (πιστεύετε – the verb<sup>87</sup> implies action)(cf. also Keener 2003:677) in him whom God has sent (ἵνα πιστεύετε εἰς ὃν ἀπέστειλεν ἐκεῖνος) (Schenke 1998:131). Believing in Jesus thus becomes the basic ethical requirement – i.e. imperative – that should characterize the actions of the crowd.<sup>89</sup> This is how you do the work of God.

This leads us to our next question: how could faith be regarded as a work of God? Faith (the verb πιστεύω, with its 98 occurrences) is not defined in a single verse in this Gospel, but the full extent of what is meant is gradually developed throughout the Gospel. Different contexts should be read in relation to each other in order to achieve a full indication of what is intended; this cannot be developed in any detail here.<sup>90</sup> An analysis of the uses of πιστεύω shows that salvific faith involves full acceptance of the message of Jesus as well as his person, which includes his identity and his origin from God as Agent. Salvific faith in John is therefore a self-sacrificing, intellectual, and existential, acceptance of the message and person of Jesus to the extent that it completely transforms a person's thoughts and deeds in accordance with this message and leads to an obedient life of doing what a child of God should do (Van der Watt 2005:119-122). That is why Blank (1964:129) is correct in describing salvific faith as 'eine totale, das gesamte menschliche Sein ergreifende und bestimmende Grundhaltung'.

An important remark still needs to be made: It should also be noted that faith is not salvation. It is the *means of attaining* salvation. It refers to the action of a person, opening him or her up in total and obedient acceptance of Jesus, the source of salvation, the Giver of eternal life. This is the reason why faith could be linked to 'works'.



Faith requires an 'action' from the human in responding to the invitation of Jesus – it is a matter of opening up to Jesus and his revelation and to accept him and it in full. Brown (1971:265) remarks that John's view on the relationship between faith and works shows that salvation is 'not a question of works, as if faith did not matter; nor is it a question of faith without works. Rather, having faith is a work; indeed, it is the all important work of God'.<sup>91</sup>

What is the significance of Jesus' basic ethical remark in the light of the structure of action formation? It shows that when Jesus was asked about ethics, he focused on the worldview of the people. They should change their view about him and accept him for what he stands for. As was seen, the primary ethical action is to enter into a relationship with Jesus. By doing this, and acknowledging him as the holy one that comes from God, who represents the reality and presence of God (1:1,18), i.e. the contents of the connotative image of Jesus within this mental world, the structure of the mental world changes in the sense that Jesus takes central position within the connotative images. He is now determining the identity of the people (they are his followers, children of God, and he is their Lord and Teacher – Ch. 13), they must follow the values and principles he is standing for (should love like he loves, should follow his examples, etc.) and therefore act like he acted, expressing the values of honoring and loving God. Not believing in him would of course result in the opposite identity and actions.

The point to note for the discussion on ethics is that Jesus' answer aims to bring about a change in thinking and attitude in his hearers – from hating to loving and believing him. Jesus does not address particular physical external actions, but the way they think (i.e. their mental world). If things change there, at the beginning, the whole continuum will be influenced accordingly. This illustrates and confirms that expanding the criteria for analyzing the ethical dynamics of a document assists in analyzing the true ethical dynamics and form of argumentation in John.

#### *b) Sin: from worldview to action*

That the basic ethical action in John is expressed in faith in Jesus, is substantiated by the way sin, as the contrasting reality,<sup>92</sup> is presented in this Gospel: the essence of sin forms the counterpart – it focuses on the unwillingness of people to accept and believe in Jesus (16:9) – the opposite of faith, implying that they do not do the works of God.<sup>93</sup> The essence of sin in the Gospel is not necessarily doing wrong things, but doing the wrong thing, that is, not accepting Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (16:9 – see Hasitschka 1989 for a detailed discussion). This basic negative attitude towards Jesus is indeed also expressed in active deeds in the Gospel that could be called sin. However, one should not confuse the symptoms (evil deeds) with the real problem (not accepting Jesus). The real issue is the refusal to accept Christ, which results in evil behavior that becomes physically visible in hate, murder (3:20; 8:44; 15:18ff.) and lies (8:44), theft (12:6), or seeking self-honor (5:44; 15:19), i.e. loving this world and not God

(1 John 2:15-17; see also 3:19-20; 5:42). Such deeds are only symptomatic of the state of the sinful existence of a person. When believing in Jesus cures this 'disease', the symptoms will be treated automatically – that person will pass from death to life, from lies to truth (5:24) and that will become apparent in his or her deeds. This again confirms what was said about the continuum: a worldview is ultimately expressed in actions. Both the beginning of the continuum (accepting/not accepting Jesus) and the end (unacceptable behavior) are covered by the concept of sin in John.

*c) The good and the truth as overarching ethical concepts*

The following example illustrates the holistic ethical perspective of John even further. It shows that John does not separate being, identity, principles or actions from one another. He covers the whole continuum of action formation with the term 'truth'.

The use of the 'good' (ἀγαθός) has been a central point of discussion in philosophical debates since Socrates.<sup>94</sup> There the 'good' was usually seen not as an action, but as something to strive for,<sup>95</sup> for its own sake or for the sake of what is useful (Höffe 1992:110) but it could also motivate actions or indicate the outcome of an action or qualitatively determine an action.<sup>96</sup> John also knew and used the term ἀγαθός, though very sparingly – it is used only in the following verses: 1:46; 5:29; 7:12; 3 John 11. A question that beckons, in the light of the centrality of the term in philosophical discussions, is what role did this term played in John?

In John's Gospel ἀγαθός is mainly used with two different focal points, which may also overlap, namely, in the sense of what a person qualitatively does (quality of deeds) and what a person qualitatively is (quality of a person on the basis of what he does or is). Consider the following two examples.

In 5:28-29 the contrasting pair οἱ τὰ ἀγαθὰ ποιήσαντες vs οἱ δὲ τὰ φαῦλα πράξαντες refers in a generic way to the quality<sup>97</sup> or nature of actions, either good or bad,<sup>98</sup> on the basis of which the eschatological judgment will take place (Van der Watt 1985:71-86). Doing good, because you *are* good serves as basis for judgment. A type of anthropology is presupposed in which the quality of a person determines the quality of his or her deeds and the quality of the person's deeds illustrate the quality of that person. You do what you are and you are what you do, so to speak.

In 7:12 the focus shifts to the quality of character. The scene takes us to the Jewish crowd discussing the quality of Jesus' behavior at the feast. Some said: He is good (ἀγαθός ἐστιν) while others were of the opinion that he is not good but misleads people (Οὐ, ἀλλὰ πλανᾷ τὸν ὄχλον – see also 7:47). A general qualitative judgment of Jesus' character is made, based on what he does, as becomes clear from the negative reaction of some to his deeds – he leads people astray.

Again deeds confirm identity and identity determines deeds (cf. also 13:34-35, or the discussion about the identity of Jesus in Ch. 9). No tension exists. This anthropology was typical of Socrates' views too, although the fact that a good person may do bad

things was reflected on by later philosophers such as Aristotle and others. This is also consistent with what we have seen in our discussion of 6:25ff.

The way in which the quality of the good and the bad is determined, i.e. how it is decided what is good or bad should also be noted. Judgment is the prerogative of the Father and his Son (5:22,27); they determine what acceptable (good) is and what not. The good (τὰ ἀγαθὰ) on which judgment is based is defined in terms of the will of the Father and his Son (5:27). There is therefore a way to know the 'good' – by knowing the will of the Father and the Son. This is in contrast to the philosophers' efforts to define what good is – even though many of them acknowledged the existence of an objective good, opinions differed as to how the good could be obtained. Options such as the shared community's view, participation and discovery through reason, what causes happiness or pleasure, etc. were offered as ways to determine the content of the good they strove for. In John's case the good is found in a Person (God); He is the judge whose will is paramount.

It is his use of ἀγαθός in 5:29, however, that catches the eye, especially in light of the following parallel:

5:29 <sup>99</sup>	ἀγαθὰ ποιήσαντες εἰς ... <sup>100</sup>	οἱ δὲ τὰ φαῦλα πράξαντες εἰς ...
3:20-21	ὁ δὲ ποιῶν τὴν ἀλήθειαν ...	ὁ φαῦλα πράσσων ... <sup>101</sup>

These two sets of phrases, occur in semantically equivalent contexts dealing with moral issues that run terminologically and semantically parallel,<sup>102</sup> with one exception: the noun ἀλήθεια substitutes ἀγαθός conceptual contrast to φαῦλα. 'Truth' is thus contextually used within the same semantic field and context as 'good'. The parallelism with the switch in terminology suggests that these two words refer to equivalent realities.

This brings us to an important point regarding the relationship between ἀλήθεια (the truth) and ἀγαθός (the good). The frequency of the use of ἀγαθός is low in the Gospel (three times), while the frequency of ἀλήθεια and related words is high – it is a term John favors. Truth is indeed linked to all the important characters in the Gospel and is also a key concept in the Letters. Although John knows the term ἀγαθός he consciously shows that he prefers to express himself in terms of *truth*, but reminds us of the conceptual relationship between the good and the truth. He indeed chooses not to use the well-know ancient moral term ἀγαθός, but prefer to express himself through the conceptual world covered by the concept of 'truth'. 'Doing the truth' in 3:21 is directly linked to works done in God<sup>103</sup> (τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ἐν θεῷ ἐστὶν εἰργασμένα – see also 1 John 1:6 – Smalley 1978:20–21). This is an echo of the remark in 3 John 11 that the person who does *good* (τὸ ἀγαθόν/ ἀγαθοποιῶν) is of (ἐκ) God – these are again semantically compatible uses that confirm semantic overlap. No wonder that Schnackenburg (1968:407) interprets doing the *truth* as a 'morally *good* action done according to God's will'.

But there is more. Truth is not only branded as a moral term by linking it to ἀγαθός but in the Prologue (1:17) it is contrasted to the *law* – as an expression of God’s moral will (See Beasley-Murray 1999:17). The law was given through Moses but in contrast grace and *truth*<sup>104</sup> came through Jesus (ὅτι ὁ νόμος διὰ Μωϋσέως ἐδόθη, ἡ χάρις καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐγένετο).<sup>105</sup> Grace and truth are presented in a superior light<sup>106</sup> compared to the law, without degrading or eliminating the law.<sup>107</sup> The law remains intact as part of Scripture that witnesses to Jesus (5:39,46; see also 9:28-33 - Ibuki 1972:203-204). There is no inherent conflict between truth and law, since the law is true and reflects the truth if it is interpreted correctly (see 5:39-40; 7:14-24). ‘Doing the truth’ is indeed doing the works in *God*, as it is stated in 3:21 (τὰ ἔργα ὅτι ἐν θεῷ ἔστιν εἰργασμένα – see also 1 John 1:6; 3 John 11). Ibuki (1972:205) argues that the contrast in 1:17 is therefore between the law and an intimate relationship with Jesus. Lindsay (1993:132-133) emphasizes the faithful fellowship of God with humankind based on the use of grace and truth in Exodus 34:6. A continuous bond of faithful fellowship is implied. There is a shift from the juridical (law) to personal relationships as the ethical basis for argumentation.

The point is: both moral concepts, the good (value) as well as the law (juridical), are semantically connected or even ‘absorbed’ in the concept truth, though in different ways.

The significance for us is that the truth that Jesus brings becomes an important norm for identifying, measuring and judging moral action. The good and even the requirements of the law should be interpreted in light of the truth. It is therefore crucial to understand John’s semantics when using the word ‘truth’ and how this relates to ethics.

The term ‘truth’ is used in diverse ways and contexts in this Gospel.<sup>108</sup> The Father, Son and Spirit are all characterized by truth. Truth is what belongs to or could be associated with God Köstenberger (2005:34), whether it refers to knowledge, people (in a personified way), qualities, or actions (Beasley-Murray 1999: ad loc.). Truth belongs to God, is determined and defined by God (cf. Barrett 1978:167; Harris 1994:69), and functions there where God is present.<sup>109</sup> Truth is likewise intimately related to Jesus (Koester 2005:117-133; Lindsay 1993:140), who is called the truth, and the Spirit, which is called the Spirit of truth.<sup>110</sup> There is indeed a close interrelationship between truth and the respective functional relationships between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. God, the Father is true. Jesus, also being true, witnesses to this truth through his revelation. Ibuki (1972:115) therefore argues that truth is directly related to the unity of the Father and the Son (Köstenberger 2004:32). The Spirit of truth again leads the believers in this truth<sup>111</sup> that Jesus is and has revealed. In this way the Father, Son and Spirit form a coordinated and functional whole in the Gospel, each with their own function in establishing truth in this world. As Schnackenburg formulated it: “‘truth’... covers everything that belongs to God’, functioning as a sort of ‘symbolic term’, covering what could be included under ‘divine or divinely related’.

It is precisely this overarching symbolic use of the concept of 'truth' in the Gospel that makes it a perfect fit for John's view of ethics. The concept of truth is related to believers in various ways and covers a wide spectrum of who believers are and what they are supposed to do. Believers who listen to the voice of Jesus are said to be of/out of the truth (18:37 - πᾶς ὁ ὢν ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας) and know the truth, since Jesus is the truth and brings the truth, based on his relationship to the true and faithful God. This truth, presented in and through Christ, sets believers free (8:32 - γνώσεσθε τὴν ἀλήθειαν, καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια ἐλευθερώσει ὑμᾶς) and sanctifies them so that they can *inter alia* do the truth (3:20-21 - see also 1 John 1:6) and participate in the mission of Jesus in this world (17:17-18 - ἁγιάσον αὐτοὺς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ· ὁ λόγος ὁ σὸς ἀλήθειά ἐστιν). Because of this truth, believers are not only saved (set free to be children of God - 8:32), but are also equipped (sanctified) for what lies ahead. The words (revelation) of Jesus (8:31) that represent the truth, lead them to faith in Jesus, resulting in them becoming part of the family of God (be in truth), living according to the will of the true God, which is the truth. The truth is revealed to and could be among and even be a part of people. If they seek truth, i.e. knowledge of and a relationship to the divine, they can find it in Jesus through faith. By simply looking at this rich variety of expressions that link believers to the truth, the all-encompassing significance of truth becomes more than evident. Jesus brings the truth and the believers accept the truth, are determined by the truth, and live according to the truth. For our purposes one could say that their ethical program is mapped by truth. Their belief in Jesus and relationship to the Spirit exposes them to the truth and makes them part of what is generically identified by the word 'truth'. Functionally truth seems to qualify the totality of what the believer is and should be when he or she becomes part of God's people through faith and the birth of God (1:12-13).

The above descriptions cover the total span of the lives of believers, from their origin, their identity, to guiding their deeds. Truth semantically functions as a qualitative spatial (in the sense of 'a fictive space created through relations' that is typical of group-orientated societies) designation, originating from and qualified by the Father, revealed by the Son and witnessed to by the Spirit, within which believers are introduced through faith in Jesus. Who believers are and what they do happens 'in the truth and in truth'. This is just another and indeed symbolic way of saying that a person is totally determined by God.

It is common in ethical discussions to distinguish between teleological and deontological ethics. Broadly speaking the deontological focuses on what is right, the juridical, and the teleological on the value (i.e. the outcome of an action or what is good) aspects of actions. 'Good' as a concept is usually more related to the value aspect, while 'law' is linked to the juridical aspect. The term 'truth' semantically combines both areas, determining both what is 'good' and what is 'right'. It is right and it is good, because it is 'truly divine'. The term 'truth' covers a wider semantic range than either 'the good' or 'the law'. Truth is also personified in John - it is not abstractly defined or

restricted to laws, but linked to people. This gives the ethics of John a different character: it is relational ethics. In exploring the ethics of John further, we need to ask exactly what this means.

#### 4. CONCLUSION ABOUT JOHN AND THE STRUCTURE OF ACTION FORMATION

This analysis of John highlights several aspects:

The basic ethical action required according to John is not external but internal, although the effects will of course be expressed externally by means of concrete outside actions. It deals with ethical change that starts with a change in worldview. It is something a person should do within him or herself, addressing his mental world first, so to speak. He or she should believe in Jesus, i.e. allocate to Jesus (as connotative image) the central point of orientation or the highest position in the hierarchy of the mental world. This of course reorients a person's worldview, with the result that both identity and values change significantly. Accepting Jesus and what he stands for as a point of orientation suggests that the worldview presented by Jesus now influences and adapts the worldview of the particular person. For this change – regarded by John as ethical action – the person him or herself is responsible. By accepting the suggested changes in one's symbolic universe, the continuum as a whole is synchronized – a new identity leads to new values... etc. According to John an ethical action is therefore not only an action in relation to others, but also what one does to oneself, by changing one's worldview. It goes even further; in the Johannine literature, appeals are made according to every aspect of the continuum. In 6:28 the acceptance of Jesus leads to a change in worldview. By accepting Jesus, one receives eternal life and thus becomes a child of God who should abide in Jesus, i.e. a change in identity (15:4); values changes – the honor of God becomes paramount (5:23; 15:8) and the family of God should be cared for; love one another becomes a basic principle (13:34-35) and this is expressed in Jesus' prescriptions and example that should be followed (12:24-26; 13:15). In this way the different aspects of the continuum are addressed directly and in specific ways by John.

The total life of the person is influenced. This is also aptly described in the Gospel. For example, in Chapter 13 Jesus washes the feet of his disciples to set an example to them (13:15). They should do what he does – since they believe in him; they are his disciples (6:28). Their worldview is re-orientated towards that of Jesus. By loving one another as Jesus loves them, the world will be able to identify them as those who belong to Jesus, i.e. recognize their identity (13:34-35). The link within the continuum described above is evident. The actions, prescribed and stemming from the principle of love, based on their adherence to Jesus will reveal their identity as a reflection of their worldview. If you ask why one disciple should wash the feet of another, the answer takes you right back to the worldview of that particular person.

This reminds us of the famous question posed by Plato: whether a person left on an island would act morally? In the case of John's negative anthropology the answer

would be no, since the person would be in darkness even if some of his deeds are acceptable. It is only if his worldview is synchronized with that of Christ that his behavior is regarded as the will of God and is thus morally acceptable. This reinforces the view that ethics according to John are not just actions, but include the totality of the continuum of action formation.

This brings us to another observation. If moral actions are embedded in such a continuum ranging from a person's worldview to action, this has clear implications for the debate among proponents of different systems. Actions are the result of worldviews, or belief systems. In considering specific actions, the question about the motivation and source of the action should also be considered. If one says that you replace the Christological orientation with say a natural or rational (i.e. where reason is the highest connotative image in that particular worldview) orientation, claiming for instance an ethics based on common sense, the continuum changes with this replacement. One can say that a different ethical system results that no longer stands in the Christological tradition. The actions may ultimately be the same, but the motivation for these actions differs. Abe Malherbe (1986; 2004) has shown that this was also the case with the ancient philosophers. In many cases supporters of different philosophical schools acted the same, but not for the same reasons. Could one then say that they acted the same ethically? A similar situation occurs when Peter or Paul encourages their church members to follow some (not all) of the social actions of their non-believing neighbors, as is evident in, for instance, the *Haustafeln*. If one considers the description of these *Haustafeln* in Col. 3:18ff., it does not really differ from what was expected in society at that time, but the addition of the concept (=connotative image) *kurios* (seven times) in the light of the strong Christological orientation in the previous part of the Letter, change the motivation and reason for these actions. Thus the *Haustafeln* in Colossians represent a different set of ethics than that of for instance the Stoics, although their concrete actions will not differ that much. To my mind this also applies to Christianity and humanism, where many of the actions overlap, but essential reasons for acting in a particular way differ.

By approaching the dialogue in this way, differences and similarities can be identified and understood. Placing them within their respective systems would enable the parties in the dialogue to consider the implications as well as expectations of these systems co-existing or even competing in present-day society. This might result in a more open dialogue.

By suggesting that people with different worldviews engage in dialogue, the difficulties of such a dialogue should not be underestimated. Agreement on how such a dialogue should be conducted is needed, i.e. an *ethics of dialogue* should be worked out. This cannot be done here, but it is needed.

Another point to note has to do with the relationship between actions and the rest of the continuum. The issue is the well-known question: is what one does who one

is? Socrates argued that this is indeed the case. A person's deeds will reveal who he is, since they are motivated by what the person thinks and believes. This was disputed by successors of Socrates such as Aristotle and others who grappled with the question why one sometimes behaves differently from who one is. This is of course not foreign to what is found in the New Testament: Paul, for instance, remarks in Romans 7:15ff. that what he wants to do he does not do and vice versa. In 1 John 3:9-10 it is remarked that a child of God cannot sin, but in 1 John 1:8-10 it is stated that if one claims to be without sin, one is lying.

This question obviously introduces the issue of the will or at least the participation of the individual when it comes to physical actions. John solves the problem by acknowledging that one makes mistakes or errors in judgment that harm the relationship between the individual and God, but that this situation should be rectified by confessing the sins and thus correcting the relationship. This implies that you should (continue to) act according to your identity, but if you make a mistake, you should correct it. This solution is possible, since the essence of ethics in John is the relationship with Jesus, as shown above. By keeping the relationship with Jesus intact, the whole continuum is kept in balance.

Positioning ethics within this continuum does not make 'everything ethics', but integrates and relates ethics to the whole spectrum of life. This is why the term 'theological ethics' (for instance, Schnelle in connection with 1 John) is often used to describe aspects of Biblical ethics. Of course, not all forms of ethics will be so intimately integrated, since laws – as a form of ethics – are often not motivated and it could even be that laws are not moral at all, for instance, in cases where people are forced to do wrong things under the law, as often happens in wars.

In this light it could be asked what the contribution of the New Testament to a discussion today could be? I have already mentioned that the New Testament is not only a cultural-historical phenomenon – as many secularized societies would label it – but also still forms the authoritative basis – though in different ways and intensity among different groups – of a two billion-strong community of people who call themselves Christians. It is therefore important, including in areas that tend to move towards secularization, to continue to consider the significance of the New Testament, also in academic circles.

- The way in which a person's behavior is integrated into the totality of his or her life – as it is reflected in the continuum – at least challenges the moral theologian, as well as other participants in the ethical debate, to put their cards on the table, so to speak. Why do we prescribe certain actions? What are your motivations and eventual purpose? Honoring God, or serving humanity or even yourself, are representing different ethical systems. Discussing systems and not only actions, would stimulate the debate. For instance, if Christian ethicists claim that they do



not accept biblical ethics any longer, what are they saying exactly? Do they not prescribe certain actions, or do they not ascribe to a worldview in which God is central or perhaps a worldview in which Jesus and what he stands for takes a central position. The answers to these type of questions would obviously lead to other questions – if you do not accept Jesus Christ as central or significant to your worldview, should you still call your system Christian and if you do, why?

- From this it is clear that carefully exploring New Testament ethics is relevant to the discussion and Christian ethicists should also not too easily brush New Testament ethics aside, since such an approach is challenged in its essence by what we find in the New Testament. Just as an aside: saying this does not imply that Christian ethics and Biblical ethics are identical – by no means; the hermeneutical process requires other issues such as current views, socio-cultural changes, the history of dogma, etc to be taken into account. Christian ethics is indeed more than Biblical ethics, but the point is that it can hardly function without considering New Testament ethics.
- New Testament ethics is not a new creation – it did not fall out of the sky as a unique system, but is part and parcel of the socio-cultural environment in which it functioned. Its roots lie in the Jewish ethical environment (see the discussions about the law, etc.) and it reflects the clear influence of Hellenistic culture, as is evident, for instance, from the virtue and vice lists or *Haustafeln* which are prescribed in the New Testament but run in tandem with what was common behavior in the ancient Hellenistic world. The important advantage of realizing this is that if the texts are carefully read and scrutinized, the way this interaction of ideas took place may be traced and plotted. The changes that took place within the interaction of ideas from different sources (Jewish, Hellenistic) help identify what is central and what is not in this process of interaction. By identifying those aspects that were non-negotiable and those that did not really matter but were accepted as part of common morals, the essence of what the New Testament was intended to contribute may be identified. One can thus identify those aspects without which New Testament ethics would lose its identity and which would result in not being able to talk of New Testament ethics any longer. Those non-negotiable aspects that characterize New Testament ethics in its essence should be valuable in discussions, not only with moral theologians but also in the inter-religious debate. Without those aspects one cannot really claim to stand in the tradition of the message of the New Testament and the religion that bases itself on that tradition.
- Approaching the issue of New Testament ethics in a more holistic way emphasizes the fact that each ethical system has a history (roots where it comes from and foundations on which it is built) but also a futuristic element, motivating people to continue behaving in a particular way (what they want to gain or attain by

accepting that particular ethical system). By acting in a particular way a 'reward' – which can take many forms – is expected. To my mind these aspects should be taken seriously whenever a particular ethical system is considered. People do not simply act; they act with a reason – we are all embedded in a tradition; we are children of our time, a time in which the New Testament still has a role to play.

- Wolter emphasized the importance of ethos as the way communities act consciously or unconsciously. This overlaps with the example provided by Meeks: if you tell a child 'Behave yourself!' you actually emphasize proper moral behavior, but you are not giving him or her any direct moral guidance. Your words 'behave yourself' rely on the ethos of your family and the fact that the child is aware of what the ethos involves. His or her actions will be fed by this ethos. This ethos of a particular group, such as the Johannine group, cannot be properly described if the 'whole picture' is not considered. From there it is filled out. Approaching the New Testament in such a holistic way enables proper understanding of the process as a whole and on this basis solid dialogue<sup>112</sup> may take place.

At this stage a brief detour is necessary. Crucial in discussions about ethics and the influence of ethics on people is of course the question of the role and authority of the Bible in the discussion. The way in which the authority as well as the hermeneutical position of the Bible is viewed determines the influence of the Bible in any particular situation. Within the Christian community at large there are numerous ways in which the role of the Bible is evaluated, from the view of the seamless movement of the Bible into tradition, to a fundamentalist view, that the Bible should be interpreted literally, to a charismatic view that uses the words of the Bible to make impressionistic interpretations. In academic circles the hermeneutic problem of how the Bible as 2000-year-old document could still authoritatively communicate in a present-day situation is heavily debated, especially when it comes to the prescriptive side of the Biblical texts. Should we still take the commandments seriously especially those on sexual, familial or marital level? This is not the place for a detailed discussion about this topic. At this stage it suffices to note that although these types of questions do have a definite influence on the outcome of the debate, it will not receive further attention here.

##### 5. EXPANDING ANALYTICAL CATEGORIES AND BROADENING THE MATERIAL BASIS FOR DETERMINING THE ETHICAL DYNAMICS

In science the answers you get are related to the questions you ask. In the humanities this means that the criteria you use to analyze your text will highlight the material you will include in your analysis and that will of course determine the outcome of your research. For long New Testament ethics and specifically the ethics of John suffered from precisely this dilemma. Ethics were seen as 'having to do with moral behavior', distinguishing them to a large extent from so-called theology or theological issues. This

caused researchers to restrict their analytical categories to, for instance, paraenesis, virtue and vice lists, exemplary stories, and the like. What you found there could be used to talk about ethics. This restricted the material basis on which ethics could be dealt with considerably.

Changes in approach have taken place since. Hays (1996), for instance, tried to integrate ethics into notions such as community, running parallel to ecclesiology, soteriology and eschatology, thus suggesting that ethics cuts across these theological *topoi*. Scholars such as Wolter (2009) pointed out that ethics function in different ways and should actually be understood as being determined within the framework of ethos. The ethos of a community should therefore be in focus when asking and answering questions about moral behavior. Lately, Horrell (2005) has also broadened the scope of ethical analysis by describing the social and other dimensions of ethics in the Pauline literature. Schnelle (1998; 1998a), by using terms such as 'narrative ethics' and 'theological ethics', expresses the way ethics are integrated with the literary form in which they are presented as well as the associated theology. Zimmermann (2007; 2009) approached the problem from the perspective of 'implicit ethics', pointing out that aspects such as language, moral agent, application of ethics, social situation etc. all play a role in eventually answering the question of the nature of ethics reflected in a particular document. I find myself involved in this debate about the expansion of the analytical criteria for describing the ethical dynamics of a text. Let me illustrate what I mean with a few examples taken from the Johannine literature.

The texts of the New Testament originated within dynamic socio-historical contexts, often characterized by conflict, identity formation and seeking, and apologetic evangelism. These social dynamics are clearly reflected in the texts as products of social interaction. In authentically interpreting the texts there is no alternative to reading and interpreting them within their particular socio-historical frameworks, although those are sometimes elusive and difficult to establish. This also applies to reading the texts in order to listen carefully to what they have to say about behavior. Dimensions that should be included are the historical situation (i.e. what the historical framework of the text was, i.e. conflict or not, crisis and therefore a need for encouragement, etc. This type of information will often put the remarks found in a document within a proper perspective), social dynamics (a text reflect a social system, i.e. how people lived, what was regarded as fashionable, etc.), literary aspects (i.e. language is used to convey messages and cannot always be detached from them – the way one says something is in many cases just as important as what one says. Rhetorics are clearly important. Often specific styles are developed to convey specific types of messages, for instance, the Socratic dialogical style), theological embeddedness (i.e. what is believed and why and how does that differ from what is found elsewhere), etc. What follows is to show how a more comprehensive approach to the text may enable us to find a more informed view of the ethical dynamics of the texts of the New Testament.

*a) Values stemming from a context determined by Jewish moral tradition (law)*

Texts are products of societies and reflect what happens in these societies. Likewise the text of John reflects the social dynamics of the society it originated in.<sup>113</sup> The events and characters in the narrative of John are therefore exponents of the social fiber of the society it originally belongs to. By tracing the lines of action of the characters within the context of this narrative the underlying ethical system can be traced to the extent that it is accessible through the text. The ethical system is not mentioned explicitly, but rather 'hums' in the background, becoming evident when a character acts or is expected to act. By collecting all the 'notes' of the 'hum' a profile of the ethical expectations can be constructed.

Reading John this way, it becomes evident that the full scope of moral situations envisaged by the Jewish Decalogue is indeed present and addressed in this Gospel (except for the tenth commandment which is not explicitly dealt with). This is not surprising, since the Johannine community grew out of a Jewish context and is still in conflict with Jewish opponents. It must first be noted that the Decalogue is not mentioned explicitly in the Gospel, neither are the situations in this Gospel where moral issues are addressed, explicitly or directly linked to the Decalogue (*νόμος* should not be equated with the Decalogue in this Gospel). This does not exclude the possibility of the implicit presence of the Decalogue. However, where this is the case it is likely to be in its interpreted form. The Decalogue in Jewish society seems to have had a generic function. Miller (2004:6) argues this in detail, correctly maintaining that the commandments of the Decalogue were interpreted in such a way that they were applied to all spheres of life. The living tradition of the Jews in society was based on a discernible tradition that could somehow be traced back to the Decalogue.<sup>114</sup> In the Gospel the material related to the various spheres of reality suggests such an implicit link.<sup>115</sup>

An overview of some of the relevant texts must first be briefly considered to map the field. In 10:33 his Jewish opponents accuse Jesus of blasphemy, because he as *man* wanted to make himself God (*ὅτι σὺ ἄνθρωπος ὢν ποιεῖς σεαυτὸν θεόν* – 10:33; see also 2:13ff., 4:23-24; 16:2; 17:3). This is clearly a Jewish issue related to the holiness and honor of the God they worship based on the first three commandments. Little needs to be said about the Sabbath (the fourth commandment), since it is a major point of contention in this Gospel (5:9; 7:22ff.; 9:14, etc.). Family honor and appropriate filial behavior – which are typically linked to the fifth commandment – are confirmed in this Gospel, although earthly filial relationships are constantly downplayed in the light of the heavenly family of God (Van der Watt 2000; 2001:158-177). Murder is rejected throughout the Gospel (5:18; 7:19 in the light of 8:44; 11:53; etc.). Two passages reflect on marriage, namely, the discussion with the Samaritan woman (4:16-18) and the woman caught in adultery (7:53-8:11) – both reflect Jewish conventions of those days.<sup>116</sup> A negative remark is made about Judas, because he stole money from the common purse (12:6), which is of course dealt with in the eighth commandment. In 8:44 Jesus

calls the devil the father of lies. Obviously children emulate their father (8:39<sup>117</sup>-41). This is seen in the opponents' false witness concerning Jesus (8:48; 18:30; 19:7).

The tenth commandment differs from the others since it lacks concreteness in determining trespasses. Normally a law is set, the way trespasses are determined is fixed and a punishment is given for trespassing. In the case of coveting this is difficult, since coveting is an attitude. Accordingly, how does one determine whether coveting actually transpired? Although the problem cannot be explored any further here, the solution seems plausible that the tenth commandment has an overarching function within the Decalogue, namely, to provide the reason why things such as stealing, murder, false witness and the like, occur.<sup>118</sup>

It seems fair to conclude that an underlying ethical system in John (as reflected in the lines of action) could plausibly be linked to Jewish law and tradition<sup>119</sup>, which goes back to, or at least is based on, the Decalogue. As far as the Jewish value system is concerned there is no evident contradiction. The value system is commonly accepted although the interpretation of this value system differs, as will be explained shortly. I am not suggesting that the author specifically had the Decalogue as Decalogue in mind – to start with, he does not mention it explicitly. Some of the values that emerged were common to ancient Mediterranean societies, whether they were Jewish or not, such as the prohibition of murder, many familial matters, and false witness. These are not necessarily Jewish, neither are they unique to the Decalogue.

The question arises whether one may legitimately link these relevant values to the (indirect) influence of the Decalogue rather than to general convictions about ancient Mediterranean societies. Obviously there were values such as not stealing or not killing that were held collectively by Mediterranean society, irrespective of social or religious orientation (Jew, non-Jew, or Christian). However, there are also distinctive values such as the Sabbath, or honoring the only true God in specific ways, that are not typical of non-Jewish communities, which are discernable in the determination of lines of action in the Gospel. It must be remembered that the context of the narrative world in the Gospel is Jewish. Jesus' opponents are pictured as people of Moses and the law, following the law as their moral guideline (1:17; 7:23; 18:29-31; 19:7). The thematic issues found in the forensic discussions, such as those relating to Jesus' identity (5:39-40; 7:50-52; 19:7, etc.), the Sabbath (7:20-24), murder and lies (5:18; 7:1; 8:44; etc.), are all related to the law, or are discussed in the context of the Jewish law. Within this context Jesus and his followers, as Jews, live and argue about moral issues. Some of the major issues such as blasphemy, or the Sabbath, are so specifically Jewish that one cannot deny that the frame of reference is specifically Jewish law and tradition.

Jewish law and tradition seem to be the moral bedrock of the ethical system in the Gospel. It seems fair to assume that the burden of proof rests with people who disagree to show that the intended context is not that of the Jewish law and tradition but some other moral context.

Within the context of suggesting that the Jewish law formed the constant 'hum' that guided the characters in John, it is important to note that Jesus did not reject the law and Scriptures as invalid;<sup>120</sup> on the contrary. However, his approach and interpretation of the law and Scriptures differ from that of his Jewish opponents. The law and Scriptures witness to him – something the Jews did not acknowledge (5:39) – turning him into the focal point of the law and Scriptures, and as a result, Jesus also takes on the position of judge and re-interpreter of both (5:22). Right judgment (τὴν δικαίαν κρίσιν κρίνετε - 7:24) should be made in the light of the functional and revelatory presence of Jesus. The judgment of Jesus is what ratifies and qualifies other judgments as valid and true and it is what really counts as true judgment (ἐὰν κρίνω δὲ ἐγώ, ἡ κρίσις ἡ ἐμὴ ἀληθινή ἐστίν - 8:16) since it is judgment in line with the judgment of the Father, the original giver of the law (5:22-23; 8:16).<sup>121</sup>

On this basis Jesus did not challenge the law itself but the way the Jews interpreted the law. In his discussion with the Jews about the Sabbath he warns them not to judge by appearances, but to judge with right judgment (μὴ κρίνετε κατ' ὄψιν, ἀλλὰ τὴν δικαίαν κρίσιν κρίνετε - 7:24). In another instance he accuses them of judging by human standards, according to the flesh (ὁμοίως κατὰ τὴν σάρκα κρίνετε - 8:15), because they misjudged Jesus and therefore lack true judgment. They have the law, but their judgments are not right. Moreover, they are not able to identify Jesus as the one the Scriptures are witnessing to, the One who is from the Father.

This signifies an important change in dealing with the law and indeed constitutes a crucial break. It formed a distinctive difference between Jesus and his opponents. Jesus is presented as the authoritative focus of the law and Scriptures. They witness to him (5:39-40, 46-47) and this is confirmed by the Spirit-Paraclete (14:15-16; 15:26; 16:7-11). The value system is not devalued, but the way the value system is interpreted is altered.

Two examples should suffice. Firstly, to crucify Jesus is seen by the Jews as lawful execution (18:30; 19:7) and not murder. To kill the followers of Jesus is seen as a service to God (λατρείαν προσφέρειν τῷ θεῷ - 16:2), which technically also falls within the traditional view of what the law expects and should be categorized as a lawful execution. The Jews, indeed, regarded these actions as lawful. However, from the point of view of the followers of Jesus, this equates with murder and killing. There are no lawful grounds for the death of Jesus and his followers. In fact the narrative assumes the contrary position. That is why these acts are presented negatively, as killing, within the ideological context of this Gospel (5:18; 7:1, 19, 25; 8:37, 40, 44, 53; 10:33). The same commandment is thus interpreted in two different ways.

The same applies to truth versus lies. The Jews crucified Jesus as a criminal (18:30). According to them he falsely claimed to be the Son of God (19:7). This is what they stated in their accusations to Pontius Pilate and judged that according to their law that he must be executed (19:7). Both these accusations brought by the opponents are seen

to be false, and therefore qualify as false witness. Jesus is neither a criminal nor blasphemer (10:33); he is the Son of God (and not a Samaritan or possessed by a demon – 7:20; 8:48, 52; 10:20). Hence, truth – in the light of which false witness is defined – is redefined by Jesus who is the truth (14:6). The Jewish accusations are simply false witness in light of the divine truth Jesus represents. In this way the basic value of witnessing to the truth is confirmed, but the interpretation differs between Jesus and his opponents.

This supports the conclusion that Jesus and his followers honored and shared the Jewish ethical system. However, there is clearly a difference in the interpretation of these laws between Jesus and his followers in relation to the Jews of the time.

*b) Ethics determined by social dynamics: 'You do the deeds of your father'*

Texts are social phenomena and consequently have social dimensions, reflecting the societal norms of the community they were written in. By taking these social dynamics seriously, the ethical fiber on which this community is based might become evident in the way behavior or arguments about behavior are presented.

In an argument about true witness, identity and obedience Jesus tells his opponents in Chapter 8, 'You do the deeds of your father' (8:41) and 'You do what you have seen with your father' (8:38). Through these proverbial kinds of remarks (axioms) Jesus not only draws attention to the link between behavior and identity, but also utilizes the dominant filial imagery employed in Chapter 8. The focus is on the relationship between fathers and their sons and the consequences of this relationship for the behavior of the children. According to these axioms the actions of the children reflect their identity and identity is reflected through actions.

There is a major focus in Chapter 8 on *identity*, both that of Jesus and of his 'opponents' and the consequences of having that particular identity.

- Jesus repeatedly explains his own identity as being from the Father (8:14-19, 26, 28-29, etc.) and use the absolute phrase ἐγὼ εἶμι several times to refer to his own identity (8:24, 28, 58 and 8:12, 16). He also identifies the locality of his origin as being from above (8:23). Apart from that his identity is sought and questioned by his opponents: 'Who is your father?' (8:19), 'Who are you?' (8:25), 'You are a Samaritan and have a demon' (8:48), 'Who do you make yourself out to be?' (8:54).
- The opponents also try to identify themselves as children of Abraham and even of God (8:33, 39, 41). Jesus indicates their local identity with phrases such as 'you are from...' (8:22-23).

The significance of this emphasis on identity for ethics is of course the way in which identity is integrated with behavior.

The axiom about filial relationships does not stand alone in this context, but forms part of a larger network of filially related imagery that provides a social framework for interpreting the imagery.<sup>122</sup> By doing this what could be called the *ethos* of ancient family behavior within the context of the origin of the text is recalled. Ethos signifies behavior that is generally accepted as proper behavior by the group, often without conscious reflection. If a parent tells a child 'Behave yourself', there is little in the statement itself to assist the child in knowing what is expected and what not. Nevertheless the parent feels that good guidance was given (this example was first used by Meeks). What the parent relies on is the child's knowledge of the ethos of the family, i.e. how would members of this family behave? This is, of course, acquired knowledge that relates to the worldview of the particular child.<sup>123</sup> This is what Jesus is referring to: in a group-orientated society in which the child gets his identity from his group, the head of the group – the father – usually determines the ethos of the way members of the family should behave.<sup>124</sup>

By using this axiom, (the character) Jesus introduces an ethos, in other words, an unexpressed and underlying ethical system according to which the children of God should behave. There is no doubt that within the narrative the characters are clear as to what is referred to. Lies, murder, not believing in Jesus, are concrete expressions of the ethos of the opponents which disqualifies them as children of God – that is not their identity. Correct ethos is not wanting to kill Jesus and standing for the truth. Let us briefly consider this in a little more detail.

The axiom that a child does what his father does (8:39,41) forms the basis on which the identity of the different groups in Chapter 8 is determined. Their deeds serve as the absolute criterion for their identity (Brown 1966:364). Jesus is from God and keeps God's words (8:55) and does what pleases his Father (8:25,26,29). The opponents, however, are not from God (8:47) but from the devil – the murderer from the beginning and the father of lies – as can be seen in their behavior. They choose to carry out their father's desires (8:44 - τὰς ἐπιθυμίας τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν θέλετε ποιεῖν):

- Their father is a *murderer* and so are they. They want to arrest him (8:20) in order to kill him (8:37,40). In the end they will lift up the Son on the cross (8:28). In 8:59 they indeed pick up stones to throw at him. They indeed want to kill Jesus, the Son of man (8:28), the one sent by the Father (8:29), who only speaks what he has heard from God, his Father (8:38,40). They want to kill the one who talks the truth (8:31). This clearly identifies them as murderers. They do what their father has told them. This theme is well developed in the rest of this Gospel.
- Their father is also a *liar* from the beginning and so are they. Jesus calls them liars (8:55) because they say they are God's children but do not really know him (8:41-42). They also call Jesus a Samaritan and say he has a demon (8:48). Their reasons for asking Pilate to crucify Jesus are also ironic lies (18:30; 19:7).



How should this social phenomenon of doing whatever your father requires be understood? Several indications emerge from the text.

### *I) Locality is what counts*

There are two opposing groups in the discussion in Chapter 8. A basic distinction between these two groups lies in their spatial origin or the different localities from which they originate.<sup>125</sup> Jesus is from above and they are from below, from the *kosmos* (8:23). There is a qualitative contrast between these two realities. The true (ἀληθής - 8:26) God sent Jesus, implying that the above is the space of God and truth. Jesus indeed speaks the truth because that is where he comes from (8:14,31-32,40,45-46)<sup>126</sup>, the side of God who is true. Positive ethical space is thus defined. On the other hand, the opponents have the devil as their father and he is a murderer from the beginning and the father of lies (8:44). This will be the locality where the opponents will die in their sin (8:21-24), because they are not in the presence of God while being part of that particular locality. Their locality is qualified in very negative terms.

Is there any significance in distinguishing so sharply and absolutely between the respective localities of origin? Due to the practice of stereotyping, people in ancient times would probably have understood it in terms of the social significance of the locality (i.e. Nazareth, Galilee, etc.) one comes from. Locality served as a means of identification and knowing what to expect of someone. Further measures for determining identity were *inter alia* one's birth and family (bar-, son of...), sex, or age ('You are not 50' - 8:57). Based on these means of identification certain characteristics and behavior were expected (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998:165-166). Stressing locality therefore creates certain expectations of behavior based on the identity linked to that particular locality. This is why Jesus qualifies the localities by linking them (even if only implicitly) to either God or the devil. Coming from above makes one a totally different person from one who is from below.

### *II) The space is inhabited by two families*

The space is inhabited by two families, or at least by fathers and children. (The family imagery is applied in a limited way - not all aspects of family life are utilized. Only what seems necessary to convey the message). The rest of the imagery is developed on the basis of kinship relationships and focuses on the statement that children do what they see their fathers doing. To the question as to why they do so, several answers are given, *inter alia* their relationship with their father, their origin and their education.

### *III) Education determines behavior*

A clear reason why children do what their fathers do is based on the imagery of education. Jesus remarks that his Father *taught* him what to say (8:28 - ἐδίδαξέν<sup>127</sup> με ὁ πατήρ).<sup>128</sup> He consequently only speaks of what he has heard and seen from the

Father<sup>129</sup> (the remarks in 8:26,38,40 are isotopes of 8:28, linking hearing to being taught).<sup>130</sup> This relates back to the imagery (or what Dodd called a Johannine parable) in 5:19ff., where the Father ‘educates’ the Son. Out of love<sup>131</sup> the Father showed him everything so that whatever the Father does (Barrett 1978:259), the Son does likewise.<sup>132</sup> This imagery of *education* functions as legitimizing the behavior of Jesus.<sup>133</sup> Jesus was taught by the Father – he knows the Father<sup>134</sup> and his words and keeps his words (8:55). That is why his words are true (8:31) – because he has heard and seen what the Father does.

The same seems to apply to the opponents too, though it is not stated with equal intensity.<sup>135</sup> Just like Jesus, they also do what they have heard from their father (8:38: ἃ ἐγὼ ἑώρακα παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ λαλῶ καὶ ὑμεῖς οὖν ἃ ἠκούσατε παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς ποιεῖτε). The actions of both families are related back to their education.

Again, the social dynamics of the imagery used here should not be underestimated. Ancient personalities were also judged on the basis of their education.<sup>136</sup> So what were the social dynamics of education in ancient times?

Education differed widely from area to area, at different levels of society, and also evolved over time. A general description of education in ancient times is not possible. John does, however, give us some indications of what he has in mind when using the imagery of education. Most probably John had Jewish education in mind, which included different types of education, for instance, moral or religious education, vocational training, and obviously more specialized training for the selected few.

It seems that in the Jewish context parents were largely responsible for training their children (Prov 1:8; cf. 6:20; 23:22; see also *t. Qidd.* 1.11). Shelton (1988:104)<sup>137</sup> emphasizes the fact that it was still the ideal, even in the Roman world, for the father to be his son’s teacher.<sup>138</sup> The father was responsible, not only for the child’s professional training, but also for his ethical education.<sup>139</sup>

Considering the description in 5:19-20 the pattern of education presented resembles a common pattern in ancient times where a father taught his son a trade<sup>140</sup> (vocational training).<sup>141</sup> The Father shows Jesus everything – *inter alia* to perform the godly actions of giving eternal life and eschatological judgment. This indeed echoes the practice of parents teaching their children their professions. Naturally the son – from around five to seven years old – would watch and listen to his father and in this way learn his profession (1 Sam. 16:11; 2 Ki. 4:18). In the ancient Near East the general method of teaching also involved oral repetition with the aim of memorizing the text or message taught (Anchor Bible Dictionary, ad loc.). Repetition was important in the process of education. This might be the educational background of Jesus only saying what he heard from the Father (8:26,40). Jesus memorized and consequently did exactly what he was taught by his father to do.<sup>142</sup> This was what children were obliged to do.<sup>143</sup>

Apart from this vocational training, the fathers also had the responsibility to

teach their children responsible behavior<sup>144</sup> according to the traditions and customs of their families (= *mos maiorum*. Neyrey 1996:120). 'The parental role was vital to the development of a child's character' (Dixon 1991:118) and no true father would give instruction to his son that is foreign to virtue, as Philo (*De Spec. Leg.* II.236 ) reminds us. In a patriarchal society the fathers, as the representatives of the family group, were the carriers of the tradition of the family that actually represented and expressed the 'character' of that particular family. This 'character' as expressed in the customs and traditions of the family, was highly regarded: something to protect and desire.<sup>145</sup> The fathers passed this tradition on to their children, as individuals who are embedded in the family as a social unit.<sup>146</sup> The child was therefore under social (and usually religious)<sup>147</sup> pressure to obey the father<sup>148</sup> or follow the example of the socially elevated members of the family in order to protect and extend the character of the family.<sup>149</sup> Obedience was one of the cornerstones of ancient families (cf. for instance, Prov. 1:8; 6:20; 23:22-25) and that is why a good man was the one who acted according to the will of the father and thus reflected in his actions the character or traditions of his family.

This idea of conveying tradition that determines the 'character' of the family forms part of the imagery and constitutes an important rhetorical part of the argument.<sup>150</sup> The opponents argue that they are the seed of Abraham (8:33), implying that this is where their roots lie and that this is their tradition.<sup>151</sup> Jesus acknowledges that they are the seed of Abraham (8:37).<sup>152</sup> However, they no longer act according to the tradition of their father Abraham, since they do what he never would have done (8:40). The important act of respecting and obeying their tradition as people embedded in the family of Abraham was lacking. This state of affairs is enough to disqualify them as being part of that tradition any longer. The only conclusion is that they must stand in another tradition (8:41ff.). For this argument to be convincing, the social reality of patriarchal transmittance of tradition and the obligation for children to maintain that should be accepted as valid.

#### IV) One's paternity determines one's behavior

Education within these families was not the only reason for doing what one's Father does. The filial imagery of the relationship with one's father on the basis of origin<sup>153</sup> is also used rhetorically to motivate behavior.

The opponents of Jesus are of (ἐκ...ἐστέ) to their father the devil and they want to carry out the desires<sup>154</sup> of their father (8:44 - ὑμεῖς ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ διαβόλου ἐστὲ καὶ τὰς ἐπιθυμίας τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν θέλετε ποιεῖν). This is the criterion for their behavior that distinguishes them from the family of Jesus (Brown 1966:364) and provides the reason why the opponents do not know Jesus or his Father (8:19,55) and *cannot* listen (οὐ δύνασθε ἀκούειν) to the words of Jesus (8:43 - see also 8:47).

Important for understanding the remark about the father of the opponents is the question of how the phrase 'of their father' (ἐκ...ἐστέ) in 8:44 should be understood,

since it is directly contrasted with the expression that they are not of God (8:47 - ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ οὐκ ἔστέ). That a filial imagery is intended is evident from the fact that the devil is called their *father* and not a prince or ruler (kingship imagery) as he is referred to elsewhere (8:44 and 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Within this context the expression ἐκ...ἔστέ (be from...) usually refers to some form of origin, especially in this Gospel (see BDAG:ad:loc.; Morris 1995:409).

The question is whether this idea of origin includes birth or whether it should be interpreted in a more general sense as simple identification of origin without implying anything more, like birth. This question is important because birth marks one of the most important social events in ancient society, which means that if birth is implied, it will open up several interpretative possibilities. It will therefore influence the interpretation of this imagery significantly.

Although the use of ἐκ with εἰμί in the New Testament does not necessarily refer to birth (which is usually ἐκ with γεννάω), there are indications in the Johannine literature that both phrases may be used for indicating birth, since they are used without semantic distinction in the same contexts (i.e. 1 Joh. 3:9-10; 5:18-19). Birth as a possibility should therefore be considered.

There are several indications of birth language in this context – for instance, the references to being the seed (σπέρμα) of Abraham (8:33,37), or not being born out of wedlock (8:41). In 8:44 the devil is called the father of lies with the clear implication that he is the source and origin of lies. These contextual indications invite the question as to whether being of the father also implies that he gave them their current existence, i.e. that they are born of him. If the children of the devil are born of him, it will explain their character and identity too. Identity as well as behavior was regarded in ancient times as being co-determined by one's birth (Josephus *Ant.* 4.8.39 §289; Philo *Spec. Leg.* 2.243). There were both religious and social reasons for acting 'according to one's birth' in ancient times. Parents were regarded as the ones who give life to the child, obviously as agents of God. Receiving such a gift required gratitude.<sup>155</sup> Gratitude was expressed not so much in words, but in deeds. The truly good and grateful child will act in such a way that his parents are satisfied, implying that the child will act according to the will of the parent. Birth was also important for another reason, namely the conviction that through the seed of the ancestor the person receives his 'personality' or characteristics. This is implied in Jesus' argument about the childhood and the children of Abraham.

Is this enough to conclude that birth should be understood as the primary social framework of this imagery? It is questionable whether this is indeed intended here. Birth is not directly mentioned as the social framework for 8:44. The theological reason is most probably that life is the sole characteristic of God. He gives birth and life (spiritually and physically – 1:2-4). This is not an ability the devil has. This seems to be the reason why John does not mention the imagery of birth here. We see the same tendency in 1

John 3:1-10 where the verb γεννάω is used freely of God, but not of the devil, although the children of the devil are mentioned. No, the devil rather murders than creates life (8:44).

This leaves the possibility that this reference focuses on the interrelationship between father and son in a patriarchal family and that the reasons for obeying the father<sup>156</sup> are to be found within the constraints of precisely such a family. The filial language (father and children) seeks to retain the social dynamics related to being part of a group-orientated patriarchal family.

Kinship norms regulated human relationships within and among family groups (Malina and Rohrbauch 1998:166). Ancient Mediterranean people generally functioned according to, and their identity was defined in terms of, community principles or *oikos*. The individual member usually found his or her self-definition within the framework of the behavior and identity of other members of the family and his or her individuality was defined in terms of that group. S/he was expected to preserve the traditions, customs and characteristics of his/her particular group in all respects,<sup>157</sup> especially through his/her behavior. One's behavior was judged in terms of the positive effects one has on the groups' honor (see Sir. 3:6-16). Loyalty, respect and responsibility towards his or her community and its traditions were (naturally)<sup>158</sup> part of a person's self-definition.<sup>159</sup> Consequently they took their decisions in the interest of the group, since individuals were seen to represent the group. Philo reasoned that it was a matter of honor and glory to ensure the practice of good customs (*Quod Deus sit Immutabilis* III.17-18). Group pressure and expectancy were therefore socially significant.<sup>160</sup> This obviously implies that a person should act according to the requirements set by the head of the group,<sup>161</sup> since he is the carrier of the groups' tradition, which determines their identity.<sup>162</sup> Being from their father (8:44 - ἐκ...ἐστέ) clearly links them as individuals to the patriarchal family and suggests the influence of that family as a group on their behavior.<sup>163</sup> As members of that particular group they are bound by their groups' norms and expectations and therefore cannot (οὐ δύνασθε - 8:43) listen to the words of an outsider from another family like Jesus (see also 8:21). The opponents can only do what they have heard from their father: they choose to carry out their father's desires (τὰς ἐπιθυμίας τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν θέλετε ποιεῖν). They do not listen to God at all (8:47). They are ἐκ the devil (8:44) and not ἐκ God (8:47) and that makes all the difference.

The emphasis of this imagery is more on the group orientation prevalent in ancient families than on the social dynamics of birth as such (that also forms part of group orientation, but brings in additional social implications).

What about the origin of Jesus? He formulates his unique relationship with his Father in terms of him *knowing* the Father (8:55), an argument that confirms his *pre-existence* in this context (8:56-58). That Jesus knows God may be seen from the fact that he also keeps God's word (τὸν λόγον αὐτοῦ τηρῶ - 8:55). Knowing is not only cognitive, but strongly relational. Jesus proceeded and came from God (8:42). Jesus is

not described as being born from God, but he proceeded from him, indicating his roots, origin and identity. Although the word ἐκ is also used in relation to Jesus in 8:42, the verbs (ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ) ἐξηλθον καὶ ἤκω differ from εἰμί, which is used in the case of his opponents. He comes forth from the Father and is not described as being from the Father. This is in line with his pre-existence expressed in 8:58 (the imagery of birth is also not used in this case). He not only keeps the words of his Father, but he also honors his Father (8:49) while his Father also seeks his honor (8:50,54). This shows that there are strong relationships within the filial group of the Father and his Son, Jesus. The obedience of Jesus should also be understood within the social ecology of group-orientated families.

The question may now be asked again: on what does John base his axiom that a child will do what his father does? Since this does not seem to be the case in all social realities (for instance, in present-day western societies based on individualism). From the pattern of identity and behavior that emerged described above, the social reality suggested is that of a group-orientated societal system in which a person's origin, group-affiliation, and education determine his/her behavior. Such a social framework allows for such a statement.

Asking in this light what a follower of Jesus should do, the answer seems clear – live according to the ethos of God as it is expressed in Jesus. In other words, do what God would expect when saying to you: 'behave yourself'. In this way the ethical fiber of the Johannine community becomes apparent and assists us in analyzing the ethical dynamics that are present in John.

### *c) Ethics determined by literary devices*

Morgan (2007) analyzed the function of language within ancient moral discourse, emphasizing the functional influence the use of language has on the description of ethics. In John it is not different. What follows illustrates the refined use of language in conveying ethical material.

In 12:24 we find a single reference to a grain of wheat that falls into the earth, dies and bears much fruit. Within this context no other agricultural language is used. The context identifies this statement as figurative. Usually this grain of wheat saying is directly linked to the death of Jesus,<sup>164</sup> simply because the death of Jesus is the major theme in this context (8:23,27ff.). Without denying that the death of Jesus is a referent, the structural development and restrictions of the text should be taken seriously.

The Greeks approach Philip with the request to see Jesus. Jesus' reaction is introduced with a short statement about his own death, described by way of double entendre, followed by an ἀμὲν ἀμὲν-saying, implying that an important saying is to follow based

on the preceding statement.<sup>165</sup> This ἀμὴν ἀμὴν-saying introduces an interesting sequel of antithetical parallelisms that should be considered carefully.

The imagery of the grain of wheat is presented in the form of two provisional sentences (ἐάν + aor. subj.).

ἐάν μὴ ὁ κόκκος τοῦ σίτου πεσὼν εἰς τὴν γῆν ἀποθάνῃ, αὐτὸς μόνος μένει·
ἐάν δὲ ἀποθάνῃ, πολλὸν καρπὸν φέρει.

The points of contrast in this parallelism are: a) Death vs. not dying; b) staying single (of individuals = being alone) vs. bearing much fruit.<sup>166</sup> The falling into the ground, as well as the nature of the seed is not repeated in the second part of the parallelism. This indicates that the main emphasis does not lie there, but that information is, however, necessary to sketch a framework for understanding the image. It gives information about what dies and where it dies, although this information will not be developed further. The emphasis is on death and the positive (productive) results of death.

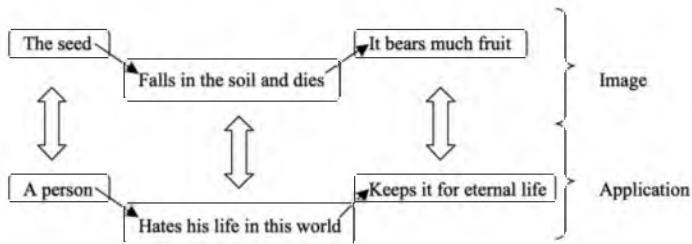
The communicative strength of this image rests on the assumption that death is not always profitable, especially not in an ancient framework in which earthly life was valued as the reward for the righteous person (see 9:1-3 where sin and sickness are related in terms of alienation from God). The function of saying a grain of wheat *must* die to bear fruit provides a positive reinterpretation of death. It gives death a positive purpose.<sup>167</sup> In spite of Morris' (1995:527) assumption that a seed that dies to produce fruit is a 'general truth' the validity of such a presupposition is not widely attested in the ancient world and no longer accepted today, but at least the author of John accepts it as a given. He uses this Johannine axiom<sup>168</sup> as the rhetorical basis for his argument.

A second pair of parallel yet antithetical sentences follows this Johannine axiom.<sup>169</sup> The structure compares with that of the grain of wheat:

ὁ φιλῶν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ	ἀπολλύει αὐτήν,
ὁ μισῶν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τούτῳ	εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνιον φυλάξει αὐτήν.

Hating one's physical life (ψυχὴ) is contrasted with loving it, with consequent results – loving one's life will result in losing it and hating<sup>170</sup> it will result in keeping life for eternity – as eternal life.<sup>171</sup>

Contextually these two sets of antithetical parallelisms should be related by way of comparison, since the first one is clearly an image and the second one an application of the image.<sup>172</sup>



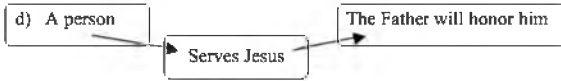
The link between the two parallelisms is a simple matter of substitution: seed should be replaced by person, dying with hating and fruit with eternal life.<sup>173</sup> The initial image (*Bild*) is applied in the second remark about hating or loving life (*Sache*).<sup>174</sup> However, the logic of this comparison lies on the level of presupposed knowledge about what happens to a seed when it falls into the soil, a sort of inner natural axiom. It is a process in which death is necessary: in this case dying is a prerequisite for productiveness. The antithetical parts of the parallelism serve to emphasize the negative or destructive side if this pattern is broken or not followed. In this way *death* and its significance is redefined. Transferring this perspective of death to spiritual reality redefines similar types of behavior. Hating<sup>175</sup> one's life is necessary for productive results. In essence the comparison therefore serves as a redefinition of death and life. Under certain circumstances death may be necessary and can produce good fruit. Similarly, in certain instances, hating one's own physical life ψυχή<sup>176</sup> or interests will have positive results.

A third set of parallelisms in 12:26 (not antithetical this time) develops the pattern even further:

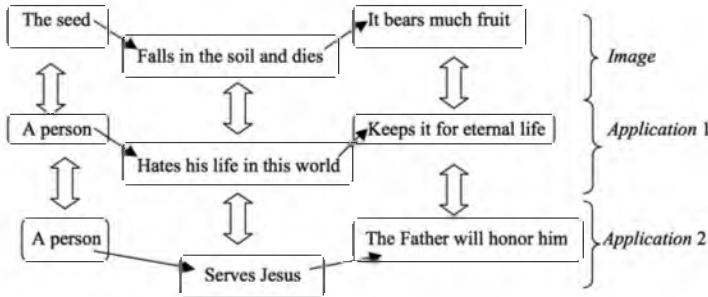
a) εἴν ἐμοί τις διακονῇ,	ἐμοί ἀκολουθεῖτω,
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"><p>b) καὶ ὅπου εἰμὶ ἐγώ c) ἐκεῖ καὶ ὁ διάκονος ὁ ἐμὸς ἔσται</p></div>
d) εἴν τις ἐμοὶ διακονῇ	τιμήσει αὐτόν ὁ πατήρ.



The pattern of antithetical parallelisms is replaced by two conditional sentences with a shared protasis (ἐάν ἐμοί τις διακονῇ<sup>177</sup>). The second conditional sentence is comparable with the first two sets in verses 24-25.



This form of the condition corresponds with the structure and content of the other parallelisms:

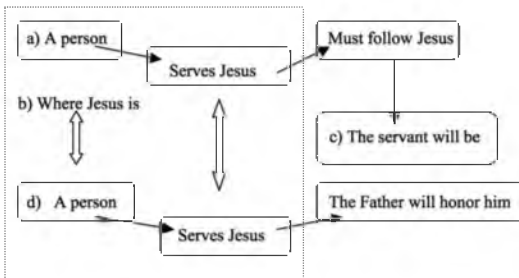


The question now is: What is the relationship between these parallel sayings: a) It could be that the latter two parallels should be read independently, but this is not very likely, given the close contextual proximity. b) It could simply be a matter of substitution. The basic statement of the seed serves to establish the conditional relationship between an event and the result. The applications (hating life or serving Jesus with the results of eternal life or honor by the Father) should then simply serve as substitutes and isotopes of one another. 'Hating one's life' would then be another way of saying 'serving Jesus'; and 'keeping one's life for eternal life' is another way of saying 'the Father will honor you' (both are in the future tense). c) It could also be a matter of progressive or expansive development on the same structural basis given in the first conditional sentence. Hating one's life finds expression in serving Jesus, but not only in that, and keeping your life involves being honored by the Father, but not only that. The two conditional sentences could then be interpreted in terms of one another (i.e. hating one's life can be expressed in serving Jesus), but not as being identical (i.e. hating life is identical with service). This relationship can be that 'hating one's life' is an attitude and 'serving Jesus' is the action flowing from that particular attitude. Turning against one's own interests (by hating one's life) may have positive results on the eschatological level. What this means is to follow Jesus and serve Him, where-ever He goes.

It is a choice that is difficult to make and not absolutely essential, though useful, partly because of the expanded focus that emphasizes the idea of service. Service is the point of focus.

As to the question of what service (διάκονος) is, the research done by Collins (1990, 1992, 2002) is relevant. He argues on the basis of extensive research on the use of the word διάκονος that service means to act as an intermediary or go-between. The ideas of suffering, table service, or loving sacrifice are not part of the word itself. The word rather refers back to the person who requires service and the person who then serves as his go-between.

Since the protases in verse 26 are the same, two different statements are linked to the same condition. The apodosis of the first conditional sentence is expressed as an imperative, while the others have indicatives (present tense except in verse 26, where it is future). It must also be taken into account that the conditional phrase with the imperative breaks the patterns shown above, since it comes between the second and third conditional phrase.



The question is how this explanatory apodosis should be understood. The imperative mood distinguishes it from the rest of the conditional phrases.

The logical flow of the other three conditional phrases is: seed die, person hates life, serves Jesus. In between a conditional sentence is inserted stating that service means following Jesus, and nearly as a tautology it is remarked that such a person will exactly (spatially) be where Jesus is. Service is therefore interpreted in terms of following Jesus spatially. Service and following are integrated. Schnelle (1998:203) remarks that John 'versteht Nachfolge als umfassende Bindung der Glaubenden an Jesus'. Being where Jesus is implies serving him. Serving him implies acting as go-between or representative. The person is also emphatically called 'servant of ME' (ὁ διάκονος ὁ ἐμὸς). Service rendered is therefore to Jesus – meaning being available to do what he requires in his service. It is therefore not service to others but to Jesus. However, service to him might include service to others.<sup>178</sup>

What does the death of the grain of wheat refer to? No direct or explicit application is made to the death of Jesus in these three conditional phrases, although the introductory remark in 12:23 refers to the cross-events.<sup>179</sup> The references in the image and first conditional phrase are general and unspecific, but in the applications the servants of Jesus are identified. It was argued that a general re-evaluation of death and life was made in the first application. Hating one's life might have positive eschatological effects. Although this seems to be a general application, the reference to eternal life already implies a link with Jesus. The second application refers directly to servants of Jesus who must be where He is, because they follow him there, and this is obviously a reference *inter alia* (not only) to the death of Jesus. Since an important function of the ἀμὴν ἀμὴν-sayings in John is to reflect and expand on the preceding remark, this image also reinterprets the death of Jesus as positive, something already present in the double entendre of describing the death as glorification. The expansions in 12:27 develop this impression, but will not be treated here.

In sum: what is the function of the imagery of the grain of wheat in this context? It redefines death as being a positive and fruitful event in relation to Jesus as well as his followers. The death of Jesus thus becomes a pattern or example for ethics, since the followers must follow suit (Becker 1981:382). Why hating yourself, giving yourself up in service to Jesus, is a positive and desirable value is rhetorically motivated by the natural event of a grain of wheat that dies to produce fruit. This is what the death of Jesus is also about. Brown (1972:471) is therefore correct in calling these verses 'a magnificent commentary on the theme of death and life'.

John uses a similar rhetorical technique in 16:16-22 where his disciples are contemplating his departure. He then compares their situation with that of a woman in labor: 'when a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world. So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.' Here the necessity of pain that turns into joy is established through this imagery. This creates hope. Types of image are indeed used to create Johannine axioms in the light of which the experience of the community may be interpreted.

What should be noted and seems to be significant to me for understanding the functionality of imagery in this Gospel is the way in which the message of the image of the grain of wheat is implicitly integrated in the rest of this Gospel.

The discussion between Peter and Jesus at the table (13:36-38) provides a provocative clue to the possible interpretation and concretization of the theme of 12:24-26. There are significant linguistic as well as thematic links between these two sections. A number of important terms overlap between these two contexts and *ONLY* between these two contexts. If the two contexts are considered, the following is evident:

12:23 The hour has come that the <b>Son of Man</b> should be <i>glorified</i> .	13:31 'Now the <b>Son of Man</b> is glorified, and God is <i>glorified</i> in Him. <sup>32</sup> If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately.
12:25 He who loves his <b>life</b> (ψυχὴν) will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life	13:37 Lord, why can I not <b>follow</b> (ἀκολουθῆσαι) You now? I will lay down my life (ψυχὴν) for Your sake. (Peter's words)
12:26 <i>If anyone serves Me, let him <b>follow</b> (ἀκολουθεῖτω) Me; and where (ὅπου εἰμὶ ἐγὼ) I am, there (ἐκεῖ) My servant will be also.</i>	13:36 <i>Where (ὅπου) I am going you cannot <b>follow</b> (ἀκολουθῆσαι) Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward.</i>
12:27 'Now My soul is <b>troubled</b> (τετάρακται), and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. <sup>28</sup> Father, glorify Your name.'	14:1 Let not your heart be <b>troubled</b> (ταρασσέσθω); you believe in God, believe also in Me.
	14:3 <i>where I am (ὅπου εἰμὶ ἐγὼ), there you may be also</i>

To appreciate the significance of this parallel the following should be noted.

- a) The immediate contexts show remarkable similarity on a thematic level – both 12:23 and 13:31 refer to Jesus as Son of man and mention glorification (referring to the death of Jesus). In 12:27 and 14:1 the word *ταράσσω* is used, although referring to Jesus and his followers, respectively. In both cases the topic related to this word is the departure of Jesus.
- b) Apart from the above thematic similarities, there are also linguistic links: these two are the only contexts in this Gospel where the two words life (ψυχὴ) and to follow (ἀκολουθεῖω) are used together. There are also references to the space where Jesus is, using the same word (ὅπου).

In this Gospel these types of contextual signals are significant, since they indicate interpretative links. Current contexts should be seen in the light of previous issues. Let us follow this clue further.

In 13:37 Peter wants to follow Jesus and lay down his life for him (as service).<sup>180</sup> What is proposed is what 12:26 proposes and indeed expects from a servant of the Lord.<sup>181</sup> In this sense Peter becomes a prototype for a follower who is willing to die like a grain of wheat. Interestingly enough the word *ἀκολουθεῖω* (to follow) is from this

point on reserved for Peter (13:36,37; 18:15; 20:6; 21:19,22) and the Beloved Disciple (18:15; 21:20) only, with the emphasis on Peter. What interests us is the discussion between Jesus and Peter in 21:15-22.

In 21:14 a reference is made to Jesus being raised from death (ἐγερθείς; Aor. Pass. – see 2:22; Rom 6:9; 8:34). After this event people would realize what has happened, as was emphasized several times in the Gospel (2:22; 12:16; 20:9). The implication is that Peter should now understand. Then a discussion between Jesus and Peter follows.<sup>182</sup> In this discussion Jesus twice commands Peter to follow him (21:19,22).

The parallels with the earlier discussion between Peter and Jesus in 13:36-38 are remarkable.

- a) The settings are the same – after a meal – but the times of day are not. In the one case it was an evening meal (with Judas disappearing in the dark and Jesus leaving for the cross) and the other a breakfast (where the day lies ahead) (13:30-31; 21:15). Whether this is symbolic is open to interpretation.
- b) In both cases love is prominent as identification of a disciple of Jesus (13:34-35; 21:15-19).
- c) In both cases Peter confesses his loyalty to Jesus (13:37; 21:15-17). The intention to be loyal is the same, but the way in which it is expressed differs – in 13:37 Peter relies on himself in questioning the Lord, while in 21:15-17 he confesses his unconditional love.
- d) In both cases the superior knowledge of Jesus about the life of Peter plays a role (13:38; 21:17-19).
- e) In both cases the word 'to follow' (ἀκολουθέω) refers to the physical actions expected of somebody who loves Jesus. In 13:36 Jesus claims that the disciples cannot follow him now but will be able to do so later. Now Jesus commands Peter to follow him. Following and love are intimately connected (reading 13:36 and 21:15-17 together – Wengst 2001:114-115).
- f) In both cases reference is made to the death of Peter (13:37; 21:19). Peter confesses in 13:37, that he would give his life, but as his denial of Jesus shows (18:15-18; 25-27), he is not willing to do this.
- g) In both cases Jesus is addressed as Lord (κύριε 13:37; 21:15-17).

These parallels show that what stayed the same was Jesus and what he required – He is still the Lord who knows everything and who requires unconditional love that should be expressed in following him. He appoints Peter as the one who should feed his lambs and tend his sheep. What changed was Peter: he confesses his love for Jesus (21:15,16,17), is really willing and is indeed going to die. What is in focus now is not him dying, however, but him caring for the sheep of the Lord. In that sense 'dying' ('hating his life' in terms of 12:26), implies caring, tending and feeding the Lord's sheep. A functional

change has taken place on the basis of the restored status of Peter (Barrett 1982:165). He should care for the total group of followers of Jesus (Wengst 2001:319). Eventually death that will glorify God – as the death of Jesus did<sup>183</sup> – will follow (21:19). What Peter should now do is to follow Jesus (21:19). He was not able to follow Jesus initially, but now he can follow (13:36). Thus with/after Peter's confession that he will give his life we find a practical illustration within the narrative of somebody who hates his life and thus serves Jesus.

What is the significance of all this for our question regarding the functionality of the imagery of the grain of wheat? The grain of wheat is not mentioned, but the motifs this imagery redefines are all present – following, serving, hating your own life by loving Jesus more, dying.<sup>184</sup> Why is the service of Peter something positive? Why is his death not a threat but an honor? Because a grain of wheat that dies bears much fruit. The axiomatic truth presented by this imagery defines and enlightens key moments in the development of the plot. It is implicitly and actively present.

The interesting development of the plot is not finished. In John 10 we have the narrative of the good shepherd. There the death of Jesus is also interpreted as for his sheep, since he cares for them. It is difficult not to be reminded of this section when reading 21:15ff., where Peter is commanded to care for Jesus' sheep and some argue that strong links indeed exist.<sup>185</sup> The question is whether Peter is indeed made shepherd here or is he on the level of substitution or a hireling? It seems that he is made a servant or go-between. There are several reasons for this conclusion. Firstly, the sheep are not his sheep but they remain Jesus' sheep (21:15-17). In ancient times the owner of sheep could appoint hirelings to tend to his sheep or he could ask one of his family or close friends to do it. A hireling is defined in 10:12-13 as somebody who does not own the sheep and does not care for them. This is not the position of Peter. He is bound in love to Jesus and that means that he loves his sheep too. He is not replacing Jesus as shepherd, but is serving as the one who cares for his sheep. This is precisely what a servant did in those days.<sup>186</sup>

If this line of argument is plausible, it means that we have indeed a network of types of images, not related at the level of imagery, but at the thematic level. This would support the conclusion that types of imagery themselves are not so important as the message they are intended to convey. John plays with different types of image and molds them to fit his communicative purposes for conveying his message, thus forming a network. It further suggests that imagery may acquire a symbolic function in the Gospel itself. The image of the good shepherd is used and re-applied in 21:15ff., which means that one should return to 10:11ff. when reading 21:15ff. What happens with Peter in 21:15ff. is not only deepened by the image in 10:11ff. of the shepherd, but also by the image of the grain of wheat that must die to bear fruit.

Because of the change in the analytical categories, the nature of the ethical material that becomes available changes. Aspects such as a committed attitude of service

towards Jesus and God, including love, obedience; striving to protect life, also spiritual life, by helping, healing, guiding, witnessing, etc. becomes a priority; acknowledging the importance of what is asked in the law as a guiding principle for one's life by not killing, stealing, etc.; using the honor of God as the goals for all actions, etc. are examples of what now becomes the foundation for talking about the ethics of John. It is clear that concrete actions are not the primary focus; they are formed and guided by what is described above.

A more comprehensive view of the material leads to a perspective that is not restricted to single virtues, vices or paraenesis. It is more suggestive of a lifestyle that is motivated in a specific way. Not only explicit material intended for moral formation is considered, but also indirect material that is not primarily related to moral formation, but reflects the moral foundations of what is presented in this text. Within the larger perspective and structure of how identity and actions are interrelated in a continuum, this creates a broader picture so that deductions and conclusions can be made on the basis of more extensive material.<sup>187</sup> Since it is suggestive of a lifestyle, the more material one has the easier it is to describe the lifestyle – and not only particular actions. It also enables a less rigid application of prescriptions, since the reasons and motivations for specific actions can be taken into account, and as situations vary, the actions may also vary if their motivation and purpose within the wider continuum are understood.

#### 6. SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

An apparent loss for many in fundamentalist circles might be that no direct 'rule book' that claims objective, a-historical<sup>188</sup> status is offered. No pre-packed set of actions is delivered which can just be copied. A more comprehensive and refined approach is suggested.

What is gained is that ethics is seen as part of life and life situations form part of who a person is. It is not only reflected in paraenesis of virtue and vice lists, but in the totality of the communicative situation, including literary, theological and socio-historical material. This results in a more comprehensive picture, forming a continuum which should be taken into account in its totality, that starts with the worldview, and show how different aspects not only form the motivation but also the drive for the concrete actions that results at the end. Using analytical categories within this framework results in a more refined view of what behavior is, what one should expect and why.

It also illustrates the fact that actions are part of – and integrated in – a larger dynamic process. Actions cannot be separated from who a person is and how he or she perceives and expresses him or herself.<sup>189</sup> In the discussion between practitioners of different religions, this will have a significant impact: structures and not only individual actions should be discussed. However, when it comes to central or key elements in the worldview, differences will remain.

This does not mean that such an approach loses its prescriptive nature. On the

contrary, it rather functions in a more life encompassing way – it places actions within the broad spectrum of worldview, identity, values, principles, etc. The main question therefore seems to move, not to the actions per se, but to why you perform and may perform specific actions. This approach is therefore sensitive to the situation and the particular nature of the situation in which one must act. The comprehensiveness of the situation plays a part in determining the actions. Obviously not every action is not first worked out and argued in every case of daily life. Our ethos, reflected or non-reflected patterns of actions that belong to the worldview of a particular group, normally guides us in our ordinary every day actions, but when novel situations occur, they are reflected in more detail and can therefore be motivated in more detail from the continuum.

Authority, or the motivation for why you feel you should act in a particular way, should therefore be looked for earlier in the process where the motivation for actions arises. ‘I must do this because...’ I cannot do anything else, or I believe it is right or ought to be done – it must also be remembered that the will also plays a role here. The relationship between who you are and what you do is rock solid. My convictions as to what should be done are based on motivations which carry authority for me because of my worldview. Authority lies more in the way I construct my worldview than the list of actions I should perform, without denying that there is a direct link between the two. If religion – i.e. the Bible or church tradition – is the source of the formation of one’s worldview, the authority of your worldview will of course be based on that. If it is based on the nature of common sense, the authority will come from that.

## 7. MY POSITION

In the first place I am a historian, seeking to understand the source documents of Christianity in their socio-historical, literary, and theological frameworks. In determining the ethical dynamics of these documents, I try to understand them for what they are – theological literature written in particular historical situations two thousand years ago. The hermeneutical challenges for a scientific reading of these texts are taken seriously.

Having said that, I also acknowledge that these documents are part of a long and influential tradition and their significance and importance lie in the fact that they are historically and factually the source documents for a particular tradition of religious expression. They are historically speaking the books of and for the church and should also be interpreted for that community within which they hold authority – which by the way is no small community, but counts over two billion. I find myself in that tradition and see myself as part of the effort within this tradition to authentically and academically express what the source documents of our tradition have to say for present-day situations. In other words, I am a New Testament scholar because the New Testament is recognized as a source document of Christianity. This means that the document should constantly be interpreted in terms of this tradition in its present-day



expressions. It should therefore be part of the moral discussions on the marketplace today. Discussing ethics is part of doing ethics, as was evident in the discussions Jesus had with the people in John 6:28.

Even in a secularized society that questions theological expressions, the study of the source texts of Christianity is of importance, not only culturally, but also historically and theologically. In the debate on the marketplace, New Testament ethics can show where Christianity came from. The essentials that determine a worldview and identity based on them can be made clear, so that people can understand who they are. Thus it can become clear where they differ from other groups and why (and of course vice versa). This could help us understand where consensus between different groups is possible and where consensus would destroy the essence of that particular group, i.e. where that particular group cannot compromise, because if it compromises at that point, it loses its authentic identity.<sup>190</sup> This alone is worth knowing and thus makes such a debate worthwhile.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 A detailed discussion is obviously not possible. See, however, Singer's (2007) valuable overview. Much of what is said here about ancient ethical views is based on his article – for practical reasons reference will therefore not constantly be made to him, although full recognition goes to him.
- 2 Allegedly the following epigram belongs to Protagoras: 'Man is the measure of all things'.
- 3 Meeks (1993:7) mentions that 'Aristotle did not think one could persuade people to be good by rational argument; a person becomes virtuous by training, by forming good habits' and 'his *Nicomachean Ethics*, did not take the form of exhortations to behave properly, nor of the kind of dialogues Plato wrote, seeking to reason one's way to the fundamental ideas on which ethics were based'.
- 4 Perkens (1992:654) also draws attention to the similarities between the Jewish and Greek (i.e. Stoic) requirements for desired behavior and explains them through the common denominator of creation (God created and the Stoics maintain that reason is operative in nature). This made it possible for different authors to 'cross boundaries' and form links to the other tradition.
- 5 The myth may be briefly summarized as follows: Two neighbors, one rich and one poor lived on two sides of the Vundutzi lake. The poor man had two daughters and agreed to give the beautiful one in marriage to the rich neighbor, but with the explicit precondition that she would only approach him by night. This she did until one day, when her curiosity got the better of her. While her husband was sleeping one afternoon, she peeked through a crack in the door and saw that he was a snake (supernatural being). He immediately realized the treason and angrily sailed into the lake. It stopped raining... for three years. The people started to die of hunger and the young wife could not keep her secret any longer. She told the people what had happened. They decided that she should go to her husband at the bottom of the lake to appease him. She consequently walked into the lake and when she disappeared under the water it started to rain. This ritual is repeated every year to ensure rain.
- 6 This is not really a new insight, but it has not yet been applied to New Testament ethics. De Villiers (2008:11) also acknowledges the integrated and inclusive nature of the discussion of 'morality', namely, that it cannot be limited to a focus on actions alone; a wider perspective is needed: He remarks: 'Central to this comprehensive conception of morality is a distinctively and holistic Christian vision of how Christians ought to live their lives. Typical of this moral vision is that in it faith in God's actions and words and orientation on the goals Christians should strive to achieve, the persons they ought to become and how they should conduct themselves are integrated in an inseparable way. In fact, faith in the actions and words of God are seen to hold decisive implications for the way Christians ought to live. This conception of Christian morality is also comprehensive in the sense that it does not only refer to right actions, but also to preferred goals and virtues and even practices in the church. It is not possible to pick out purely moral language or precepts, and separate it from purely religious language. Furger (1984:13-14) expresses similar sentiments: 'Nicht das Verhalten des Menschen, sondern die Heilsusage Gottes an den Menschen steht in ihrem Mittelpunkt, so sehr diese Zuwendung Gottes dann auch ihre Konsequenzen für das Handeln des Menschen zeigtigt'.
- 7 Witherington (1995: ad loc) argues along the same line and concludes, 'We will look in vain for extended discussions in this Gospel about marriage and divorce, singleness for the sake of the kingdom, or other relevant Christian ethical topics'. Blank (1981:69) says: 'Apart from this commandment (13:34-35) there are

no other ethical sayings in John...'. Houlden (1973:35f.). Berger (1997) does not give attention to the ethics in John in his 'theology' of this Gospel.

- 8 Aune (2003:334) describes paraenesis as follows: '(paraenesis) ... is a general term for the kind of moral exhortation that is widely accepted and is not subject to refutation. Paraenesis has often been understood as the linking together of traditional moral precepts and exhortation.... Paraenesis has several important characteristics: (1) Paraenesis is traditional, reflecting conversational wisdom generally approved by society. (2) Paraenesis is applicable to many situations. (3) Paraenesis is so familiar that it is often presented as a "reminder". (4) Paraenesis can be exemplified in exceptional people who are models of virtue. (5) Paraenesis is usually transmitted by people who are regarded as socially and morally superior to those they address'.
- 9 Strecker (1996:539) remarks: 'Versteht man unter "Ethik" ein System von ethischen Normen, die verpflichtende Weisungen für konkrete Einzelfälle abgeben, dann wird man im Johannesevangelium vergeblich nach einer Ethik suchen'.
- 10 Recent publications as well as an international conference at Radboud University Nijmegen in May 2010 have refocused attention on the richness of ethical material in the Johannine literature.
- 11 It is difficult to make watertight distinctions between these phrases, since they overlap. However, there is also diversity, which at least allows some differentiation.
- 12 I take 'ethics' in the sense of a reflective, second-order activity: it is morality rendered self-conscious; it asks about the logic of moral discourse and action, about the grounds for judgment, about the anatomy of duty or the roots and structure of virtue. It is thus, as the Oxford English Dictionary has it, 'the science of morality.' Morality, on the other hand, refers to a dimension of life, a pervasive and, often, only partly conscious set of value-laden dispositions, inclinations, attitudes, and habits (Meeks 1993:4). Esler (2003:52) sees it a bit differently; ethics is 'the systematic formulation of rules for good conduct by individuals'. Ethics is seen by Horrell (2005:97) as 'the discourse in which Paul addresses issues and problems, and articulates a response to them, giving reasons why certain patterns of conduct are right or wrong, and motivations for acting rightly'. In this way there can be something like the ethics of a biblical writer. Horrell (2005:98) points out that the letters of Paul also contains explicit arguments on certain problems in an effort to resolve the conflict – these are instances of ethical and moral reflection. The same applies to John – the performative nature of the text is in its deepest sense ethical.
- 13 Matera (1996:259); Cf. Horrell (2002:64). Note also the way in which Habermas defines the terms – I use Horrell's (2002:64) summary of his position: 'Habermas proposes that ethics has to do with the choices and actions of the individual, choices which are 'inextricably interwoven with each individual's identity'. He includes actions and choices in ethics. Morality, for him, 'is concerned with the compatibility of one's own maxims with those of others, with the regulation of interpersonal relations, where differing convictions and interests cause conflicts which need to be resolved'. See also Singer (2007:ad loc) who argues that a shift in meaning has taken place. Where ethics previously referred to the field of study that has morality as subject matter, it is nowadays more common to speak of ethical principles of judgments than moral judgments.
- 14 The word 'ethics' is derived from the term ἠθικός, meaning 'Gewohnheit, Sitte, Brauch' (Pieper 2002:25), while 'morals' is derived from the Latin word *mos* (plural: *mores*) that can mean both 'Sitte als auch Charakter' (Pieper 2002:26). In the words of Schweppenhäuser (2003:19): 'Ethik ist ein begrifflicher Reflexionszusammenhang, der sich auf Phänomene und Theorien aus dem Bereich des Moralischen bezieht'.

- 15 Pieper (2002:28) refers to Hoerster who notes that a distinction is not always made between morals and ethics. She then continues: 'Die Sprache der Moral oder die moralische Sprache umfasst das umgangssprachliche Reden über Handlungen, sofern sie einer kritischen Beurteilung unterzogen werden. Die Sprache der Ethik oder Moralphilosophie dagegen ist ein reflektierendes Sprechen *über* die moralische Sprache'.
- 16 See also Keck (1996:7). There are different ways of defining actions as ethical or not. Some use the category of good/bad (value), others right/wrong (obligations), others use emotional categories (what makes me feel happy), etc. Cf. also Singer (2007:ad loc). Taylor (1989:15) distinguish three lines of moral questioning, namely, one's obligations towards others, what is regarded as good (he combines obligations and value judgments) and what in individuals will command the respect of others in dealing with them.
- 17 Wittgenstein (1930:10f.) already argued along these lines in the 1930s. He defined the purpose of ethics as to find the meaning of life, i.e. what makes life worthwhile and what is the right way of living?
- 18 Pieper (2002:29) remarks: 'Indem der Ethiker Ethik betreibt, handelt er nicht moralisch, sondern reflektiert aus theoretischer Perspektive über das Moralische und damit aus der kritischen Distanz des Wissenschaftlers'.
- 19 Here the use of the term 'ethical' comes close to the meaning of 'moral'.
- 20 Bayertz (2004) also sees the concept 'morality' as referring to a complex of norms, values, or ideals. These do not necessarily include the motivation for the 'prescriptions'. Meeks (1993:4) prefers to speak of morality rather than ethics because ethics implies systematic normative reflection ('morality rendered self-conscious'), while morals refer to codes of behavior that characterizes daily life. Pieper (2002:32) phrases it thus: 'Eine *Moral* ist der Inbegriff jener Normen und Werte, die durch gemeinsame Anerkennung als verbindlich gesetzt worden sind...'.  
 21 Cf. Keck (1996:7). For Bayertz (2004) the difference between morality in its widest sense and ethics as a more particular defined thought system does not lie in their content and function, but in the fact that ethics does not rely on the authority of tradition, but is intended to provide justification for its guidelines on a theoretical and methodological level.
- 22 De Villiers (2008:11) defines Christian morality in similar terms, although he wants to include the basis as well as the motivation in his definition: 'Christian morality is orientation provided to Christians on how they ought to live in a vision of life based on their faith in the actions and words of God. In the vision orientation is more specifically provided on the important goals they should strive for, the sort of persons they ought to become and how they should conduct themselves'.
- 23 Works by Theissen (1989); Prostmeier (1990); Heiligenthal (1983) may be mentioned here.
- 24 Schmeller (2001:122) discusses Preisker book, *Das Ethos des Urchristentums*, and says that one should not conclude too much from the title of this book. Preisker mixes and combines words (Begrippen) and does not really discuss the term ethos.
- 25 See also Furnish (1968). Schmeller (2001:133) speaks of 'Ethosfeldern'.
- 26 Definitions indeed differ. McDonald (1998:6) sees ethos as 'the distinctive character or spirit of a community, people, or culture...' and 'moral exhortation is primarily designed to reinforce ethos'. Horrell (2005:97) uses ethos as such: 'Ethos will be used to refer to the general, and often implicit, since of the kind of "tone, character and quality of life" which shape the communities...'. Ethos indeed shapes 'social

interaction and sense of identity'. Geertz (1973:127) defines 'ethos' as follows: ethos 'is the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects'.

27 Going to church on a Sunday is often a habitual action for Christians. Mother usually does not give a long theological explanation to the children when waking them up for church or when saying grace for the food they eat. These are part of their habitual behavior they share with people also belonging to their group. Such actions are strongly related to describing the identity of the group, since they usually implicitly suggest a particular value system.

28 Meeks (1993:8) remarks: '...individuals do not become moral agents except in the relationships, the transactions, the habits and reinforcements, the special uses of language and gesture that together constitute life in community. Our moral intuitions are those unreflective convictions about what is right or wrong, fair or unfair, noble or despicable, with which all the more complicated moral decisions must begin and which they must take into account. These intuitions are not given by nature, but are shaped in the same communities and by the same kinds of interpersonal processes by which we become conscious and competent selves. This is the process which is often called "socialization"'.

29 In some cases the situation is so complicated that in-depth consideration and discussion with members of the same group are needed to determine the line of action. Take the question of the possible abortion of a rape victim's unborn child whose skull is not developing properly. Is abortion an option? In a case like this the shared value system will still inform the discussion on different levels and different weight will be given to different values.

30 Sorokin (1948:381); Van der Merwe (2008:360); Mönnig (1980:32); Despres (1975:40).

31 The definition for 'rule' in Encarta Dictionary reads: 'an authoritative principle set forth to guide behavior or action'. Three terms, namely, rule, guide(line) and principle are used in one definition. This creates confusion and hinders effective communication in the debate. Terms used to distinguish between different analytical categories often confuse rather than clarify. This more than often leads researchers into a labyrinth of confusion and vagueness. For instance, the term *ethics* may be interpreted in a variety of ways, ranging from the specific rules (principles) a person lives by, to a general description covering that person's or group's identity, values norms, behavior, etc. It may refer to traditions prevalent in a specific community, refer to the behavioral guidelines followed and/or prescribed by biblical authors to the original readers, or even the role and influence of principles/ values/ morals for our behavior today, to name but a few possibilities – thus one can distinguish between the ethics of John, the New Testament, the Bible, Christian ethics, etc., each time being confronted with a new set of problems of what is actually meant with that particular description. In defining words or terms Bergenholtz and Gouws (2007:584) emphasizes that it is not necessary to give absolute complete definitions every time, but the material should be restricted by the relevancy criterion. Overarching all-encompassing definitions are not always preferable. See also Bergenholtz and Gouws (2007:568ff.). There is a definite distinction between meaning-based and encyclopaedic definitions. See Combrink (1979:49-64); Odendal (1979:24-41).

32 De Villiers (2008:8-9); Mott (1982:VIII-IX) maintains: 'the interpreter of the social ethics of Scripture brings to the text not only a disposition shaped by his or her own experience and background. The interpreter's own focus on social need has led to an increased interest in all that can be known about social and economic

structures and ways of expressing and evaluating social norms. In aid of greater methodological self-consciousness in interpretation, modern sociological and ethical categories are applied to the materials of the Bible to suggest new possibilities of meaning and to provide a means of assessing the applicability of the results of exegesis to contemporary discussion. When such terminology does clarify the meaning of scripture, biblical interpretation finds a new vocabulary with which to address current problems. Sometimes, however, the categories are dissonant with the text, and analysis makes it apparent that the passages have little immediate relevance to modern questions. Then for Scriptural guidance we must depend upon the more general framework of values and attitudes in the biblical witness, and can arrive at a clear-cut Christian position only after extended study of these general claims in the light of historical and current empirical information' and further 'thus one interprets Scripture with knowledge of sociological, economic, and ethical categories employed elsewhere to understand socio-economic structures and conflicts. Careful exegesis and reflection reveal which principles are helpful in understanding the social phenomena and norms of biblical thought. These non-biblical constructs aid the understanding of Scripture and are tested and refined where the biblical Word relates to them; where it does not relate, they are set aside'.

- 33 It is clear that the word ethics is used to refer to deeds, but should one only focus on behavior or also on what causes behavior, or how behavior relates to theology (sometimes called theological ethics), etc. If the basic assumptions on which discussions take place are not clear, misunderstandings are bound to occur.
- 34 I appreciate the complexity of the process – much more could be said on each point below, but the intention here is to arrive at a plausible working framework that can assist in plotting the way ethical dynamics unfold.
- 35 These are the words Bergenholtz and Gouws (2007:568ff.) use to map out the necessary qualities of a proper (lexicographic) definition.
- 36 Johnson (1987:XX) maintains our world is constructed by 'gestalt structures, consisting of parts standing in relations and organized into unified wholes, by means of which our experience manifests discernible order'.
- 37 Johnson (1987:140), for instance, defines 'imagination' as 'our capacity to organize mental representations... into meaningful, coherent unities'.
- 38 Berger and Luckmann's approach is widely used as well as criticized in New Testament studies. In spite of the criticism it remains a useful way of analyzing New Testament documents.
- 39 This is a socially constructed world that gives order and meaning to human life. It meets the basic human need for meaning in the face of uncertainty, chaos and even death. Of course such social constructions need legitimation on the basis of which it is justified (Berger and Luckmann 1966:79). This is called the symbolic universe, i.e. a body of theoretical tradition that 'encompasses the institutional order in a symbolic totality' (Berger and Luckmann 1966:113-122). This symbolic universe sets the boundaries that are relevant for social interaction. Horrell (2005:85) warns that the concept of symbolic universe might be too static and fixed. It also has a narrative character. It is not only a galaxy of symbols and beliefs – it is a story with temporal and spatial aspects. Horrell perhaps confuses two levels – the symbolic universe is reflected in the narrative.
- 40 See Johnson (1987); Lakoff and Johnson (1980); Taylor (1989).
- 41 The descriptive phrase '*mental text world of connotative perceptions*' may also be used to refer to something similar to what is intended by concepts like symbolic universe. The concept '*mental text world*' (i.e. the world created mentally in a person which is created and accessible only through language/ text) refers to the

totality of a person's world of perceived knowledge made up of connotative perceptions that are mentally related and integrated into a meaningful pattern through language (for that reason the word 'text' is added). The phrase '*connotative perception*' refers to the totality of the objects, actions and even abstract concepts like love and hope which a person has knowledge of.

- 42 A further effort is going to be made to keep the terminology as well as the descriptions as simple as possible, since this is not a study in the sociology of knowledge, but basically tries to use the relevant insights to understand and describe the ethics of the New Testament, and especially the Gospel of John more effectively.
- 43 Geertz (1973:127) defines worldview as follows: it 'is their picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society. It contains their most comprehensive ideas of order'. Taylor (1989) in the first part of his book, emphasizes the attempt of humans to make sense of their lives. They make sense on the basis of imaginative constructs, or inescapable frameworks, and these account for their moral reactions and responses to the world.
- 44 These different connotative images ('symbols' according to Berger and Luckmann) are not static. They are dynamic in at least two ways – there is movement in the mental world itself according to the situation that is addressed. Different relationships call for a different organization of the connotative images. A second type of dynamics is that people are constantly changing the importance of the connotative images in their reality.
- 45 It is the stories that structure the worldview, form the identity, and shape the values and practices of a group. Geertz (1973:127) continues: 'meanings can only be "stored" in symbols... Such religious symbols, dramatized in rituals or related in myths, are felt somehow to sum up, for those for whom they are resonant, what is known about the way the world is, the quality of the emotional life it supports, and the way one ought to behave in it'. That is so because 'there is conceived to be a simple and fundamental congruence... between the approved style of life and the assumed structure of reality' (Geertz 1973:129). 'Is' and 'ought' are related. 'The powerfully coercive "ought" is felt to grow out of a comprehensive factual "is," and in such a way religion grounds the most specific requirements of human actions in the most general contexts of human existence' (Geertz 1973:93).
- 46 Horrell (2005:84) sees as a strength of the symbolic universe that it shapes and orders human life for all who lives under its canopy. It creates a framework of meaning and significance and also determines the boundaries for what is right and wrong and structures human relationships and actions. This connects ideas with practice.
- 47 Hauerwas (1981:53) emphasizes the importance of tradition in the process of knowledge acquirement as well as the formation of communities. He is of the opinion that transmission represents shared memory without which there could be no community.
- 48 These influences can also influence people in relation to each other – conventions may be faith-based, etc.
- 49 See for different approaches Brubaker and Cooper (2000); Cohen (1994); Jenkins (2008); Malesevic (2006); Ricoeur and Blamey (1995); Cote and Levine (2002); Stryker and Burke (2000); Sökefeld (1999).
- 50 Early Christians defined themselves in terms of social identity, more than personal (individual) identity. Horrell (2005:92), quoting Esler, states: 'The identity of a group, according to social identity theory, has cognitive, emotional, and evaluative dimensions, and is further defined by 'norms' that stipulate 'a range of acceptable (and unacceptable) attitudes and behaviors' for members of the group. Moreover, distinctions drawn between ingroup and outgroup members serve to enhance a positive – and necessarily comparative – sense of group identity'.

- 51 This focus on individuality is normally focused on in psychology.
- 52 Sociology normally focuses on this aspect using terms like social identity.
- 53 Horrell (2005:94) remarks 'Since social identity is constantly in process, as it were, reinforced or transformed over time, then there is certainly a clear logic in urging someone to be who they are, to act in ways congruent with their (current group) identity, particularly when there is perceived to be some threat to the viability of the group's identity, or to its boundaries or integrity'.
- 54 Moxnes (1993) thinks it is better to talk of moral understanding rather than ethics in the modern sense of the word. This might also be seen as a reflection on moral life and what an appropriate action could be.
- 55 In the philosophy of science the concept of 'values' refers to ideal preferred qualities, like truth, logic, objectivity, etc. (Joubert 1984). However, different (academic) disciplines have different values they aspire to, since their situations differ and consequently their relative places within the mental world of connotative images; for instance, political scientists will look for values promoting political agendas, teachers for normative principles in educating people, psychologists will have their particular values according to which they work (see also Coertze 1979:34; Becker 1950:134 defines values too broadly). The concept 'values' is therefore usually related to a specific context or situation and accordingly determined. In religion their origin is motivated from a transcendental world-view and their aim is to formulate the underlying foundation of what should be regarded as valuable on which the correct attitude, behavior and conduct towards the god as well as other persons could be based (Joubert 1984).
- 56 Van der Merwe's (2008:364-365) broad description is used as a basis. See also others like Degenaar (1984:24); Sorokin (1948:11-16).
- 57 Values formulated and thus existing in the mind of a person or group, influence, motivate, guide, and form the actions of that particular group/person. This is a dynamic process in which thought and decision processes involve constantly considering, weighing, and reflecting on the values. Social forces such as tradition, however, limit and restrict change. Particular values are normally part of a culture or the identity of a group which offers a 'pattern of expectations' against which behavior could be measured. The word 'conception' identifies a value as a cognitive process, while the concept of 'desirable' should be seen as a product of a community which gives actions predictability, but then these concepts must be internalized by the individuals of that community.
- 58 Sorokin (1948:11-16). He argues that values and norms are not bound to time or space, and only manifest themselves when they are concretized in actions.
- 59 This should not be confused with the meaning of 'norm' in the expression 'This is the norm here', where norm refers to something customary or normal.
- 60 The words principle and norm have different uses in different semantic fields and should therefore be defined more closely.
- 61 The contention is that the terms *norm* and *principle* basically cover the same semantic field, though the emphasis differ slightly, if one wants to be more specific. The term principle might remind one more of the fact that the point of orientation for a particular action begins here, i.e. it is the fundamental point of departure. A norm might not place the same emphasis on the beginning of the process, but rather on the authority implied by this point of orientation. In the end the nuance is so small and artificial, and may even



be described in other ways, that it seems feasible to me to use the terms as synonymous. For consistency, I will use the word principle, although norm could also have been used.

62 The question of what the 'good' is in this approach might lead to the conclusion that the observance of the law for the sake of the law might be the highest good. This is known as legalism. Different routes were taken to avoid this problem, for instance, to position the law within the framework of relationships. Doing what the law requires is then seen as an expression of love, which is the higher goal. In this way deontological and teleological approaches can supplement one another.

63 The Platonists looked for happiness while the Epicureans sought pleasure – this basic difference in orientation led to differences in behavior (although this was not the only reason for them).

64 For our purposes a distinction should first be made between moral actions (positive and negative) and actions that are not regarded as moral. Moral actions are actions based on judgment or decision (implicitly or explicitly) – usually it can be said about these actions that 'this was good' or 'it was right' or 'you ought to have done...', etc. This is so because there always seems to be a *prescriptive* side to actions; they should be carried out according to specific principles.

65 This is where matters become complicated: the term 'law' need not prescribe specific actions, but could also function as a norm in the sense that it does not indicate or prescribe specific actions, but gives a general and broad framework for particular actions that should be formulated in order to correspond to the norm. For instance, the fifth commandment, namely to honor your father and mother, or the fourth, namely, to keep the Sabbath have the functional quality of a norm (as described above) – what it exactly means in terms of specific actions to keep the Sabbath or to honor you mother must be further formulated in terms of concrete actions. This is indeed done in the auxiliary laws of the Rabbinic Jews. The same applies to the law of love that Jesus gives. Love must first be concretized in actions. This implies that although a law – that is not action-specific but functions more like a norm – has a very high level of prescriptiveness and authority, the way in which it should be concretized could be vague or filled out in different actions by different people. These actions are then also seen as expressions of the normative law – if you do not comply with the action, you are accused of breaking the law (norm) – for instance, if the Sabbath law is concretized in actions like not buying anything on a Sabbath, buying something will be a trespass against that norm/law.

66 Here the term '*regulation*' should also be mentioned – since this term is often used to refer to regulated actions pertaining to official practical organization of actions which are less directly ethical in nature, like the official approval of road or building regulations. It will not be used here.

67 Prescribing or commanding fits into a deontological approach to ethics and is a direct way of communicating values (Burridge 2008:4-8). Rules may be formulated in lists (i.e. virtue and vice lists) but they may also be communicated linguistically through, for instance, imperatives. It should be noted that linguistically there might be imperatives that do not function as imperatives or expressions that do not contain imperatives that function as imperatives. However, rules should not be used without context. The semantic content of the rule should also be determined. Take, for instance, the rule: 'You shall not murder'. It is clear that one should not do something called murder, but what is the semantic content of murder? What does it include and what not – only intentional killing or unintentional killing too? Does it include execution or killing somebody in a war? The particular semantic content is often determined by the context or by contextual arguments.

- 68 The term command overlaps with the semantic field of the two terms described above (law and rule). It could be used as a synonym for law (see e.g. the 'ten commandments') and for rule, but it might be more punctual or circumstantial (i.e. a command to attack in a war is punctual and bound to that particular situation). The term may be used as a verb (I command you – expressing an action itself and therefore linked to a point in time) or as a noun (the commandments – which are more widely applicable and may refer to a set of actions that are prescribed). Since giving a command is an action, such a commandment may also become a law (in the sense of pronouncing the law). Again the context and semantic intention in a text should be taken into account when assessing the meaning of command. The term will however be used here as referring to a prescribed action at a point in time.
- 69 The term '*directive*' also falls within this semantic field. A directive is intended – often in an official capacity – to explicitly direct actions in a particular direction, but it is usually not used in moral discourse. It will therefore not receive further attention. Another word that is used in this sense is '*parameter*'. Parameters refer to facts or circumstances that provide the constraints that restrict actions or behavior. This term is often used in ethics to indicate the general limits of or framework within which actions ought to be done to qualify as good/right in contrast to those actions that are not good/right. For instance, the parameters for acceptance of opponents are wide open (one should also love one's enemies), but restricted when your opponents intend to harm the community or to cause schism (for instance, 2 John).
- 70 The word '*recommendation*', referring to the sensible thing to do in a particular circumstance, comes close to the idea expressed above. It also just expresses advice that need not be followed.
- 71 Since the spectrum and nature of possible actions is so wide, the process becomes quite complex. There can, for instance, be actions that are classified as moral (stealing, lying), others as sometimes moral (what I should wear to work is not a moral choice, but if the choice of clothes is intended to tease it might be a moral choice) and others not moral at all (the choice of the color of my toothbrush). Depending on the situation, actions that were not intended to be moral might become moral in a different situation (like the wearing of a head covering).
- 72 Becker (1950:134-135) emphasized the importance of evaluation. In the process of action people consciously or unconsciously keep the value system of the group they belong to in mind. They constantly evaluate their actions against that particular value system. See also Sorokin (1948:40-47). Coertze (1979:34) maintains that individuals build their personal value systems through evaluation.
- 73 In this vein Kluckhohn (1960:116-117) made a distinction between what is believed, what is desired, and what is desirable (ought to be desired). Values include both what is desired and what is desirable. These might clash.
- 74 Happiness – a favorite of the moral philosophers – is not mentioned in the Johannine material. Actions are also not described as giving one's life purpose, since one already has that as a child of God. The Johannine worldview is organized differently from that of the moral philosophers.
- 75 Meeks (1993:15) remarks: 'The uses of ritual...reify the symbolic moral universe'.
- 76 Ethos is defined as customary and fixed patterns of behavior within a group.
- 77 From what has been said above, the difficulties with the terms 'indicative' and 'imperative' become apparent – the process is much more complex. Apart from that not all ethical material is expressed in the form of imperatives.

- 78 The Greek words and phrases will in most cases be presented as they are used in the text itself without changing the form or accents in order to facilitate easier recognition.
- 79 Jesus answers the question of the rich man in Mark 10:17 (τί ποιήσω ἵνα ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσω;) by referring to the commandments. The words in Luke and Mark largely correspond; see Luke 18:18 - Τί ποιήσας ζωὴν αἰώνιον κληρονομήσω; Matthew (19:16) puts it differently: τί ἀγαθὸν ποιήσω ἵνα σχῶ ζωὴν αἰώνιον. This formulation highlights the ethical essence of this issue even more. The basic actions that will lead to eternal life are sought. This is indeed the heart and essence of all ethical actions that will determine any consequent behavior.
- 80 Keener (2003:677) correctly remarks that 'works were central in Jewish ethics'. Schnackenburg (1980:39), Brown (1971:264-265); Barrett (1978:287); Schenke (1998:131); Morris (1995:319). Haenchen (1980:320) thinks that the idea of Werkreligion plays a role here. Care should however be taken not to assume that there was a strong division between faith and works in the Jewish tradition (cf. Keener 2003:677). In John faith deals specifically with an attitude towards Jesus and is not faith in general. Judging from the zeal of the Jewish opponents in John (even killing Jesus and his disciples for the sake of the honor of God as they perceived it – cf. 5:17ff. and also 16:2) they must have believed in God. In John it is however about the correct faith, which is also the reason why faith is so often qualified in terms of Jesus in this Gospel.
- 81 There is a sensitivity among commentators that 'working' should not be understood as 'human endeavor' but rather in the 'sense of striving after or working toward' (Brown 1971:261; Schnackenburg 1980:39). Jesus' answer that working has to do with faith contextually determines the meaning and nature of working.
- 82 Brown (1971:264-265), Schnackenburg (1980:39); Wilckens (1998:100); Whitacre (1999:153-154); Smith (1999:152).
- 83 Köstenberger (2004:207) notes that the repetition of the stem ἐργ- in the phrase ἐργαζόμεθα τὰ ἔργα could be seen as a Semitism. He refers to Mat. 26:10 par. (Ἔργον γὰρ καλὸν ἡργάσατο); Joh. 9:4 (ἡμᾶς δεῖ ἐργάζεσθαι τὰ ἔργα); Acts 13:41 (Ἔργον ἐργάζομαι ἐγὼ) – quotation of Hab. 1:5 (Ἔργον ἐγὼ ἐργάζομαι); 1 Cor. 16:10 (τὸ γὰρ ἔργον κυρίου ἐργάζεται).
- 84 Keener (2003:677) notes another parallel: 'Cf. Ex. 18:20, where the people's 'work' is parallel to the statutes and laws and halakah'. See also Rev. 2:26; Joh. 14:12. In Num. 8:11 we find the following remark that seems to be parallel to 6:28-29: ὥστε ἐργάζεσθαι τὰ ἔργα κυρίου. The context however differs significantly from that of 6:28-29 so that this use provides little help in interpreting John 6.
- 85 Mat. 6:3; Mk. 2:24; 10:17; In Joh. 9:3 the term τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Θεοῦ is used in the sense of 'works God does' (subjective genitive). Cf. Schnackenburg (1980:39) who refers to 9:3 and some Jewish scriptures, like 1QS 4:4; 1QH 5:36; Damascus Rule 1:1; 2:14; 13:7. Köstenberger (2004:208); Keener (2003:678).
- 86 Haenchen (1980:320) speaks of 'die von Gott gewollten Werken'.
- 87 Brown (1971:265) mentions that here we have the Johannine solution to the well-known debate about the relationship between works and faith, especially in James and Paul. Cf. also Schnackenburg (1980:39); Smith (1999:152).
- 88 John consistently uses the verb referring to faith. For him it indeed involves an action.
- 89 Schnackenburg (1980:39) correctly notes: 'All zeal for the law is useless if the Jews do not recognize in Jesus the one who is greater than Moses...who brings, in the place of the Torah, grace and truth'. This shifts the focus from prescribed laws to experiencing a person in grace and truth. Keener (2003:678) remarks that

ethics and soteriology here overlap. Doing the right thing will lead to salvation. This is what ethics is all about. Their question, “What shall we do...?” (6:28), might function as a sort of early Christian shorthand for “How shall we be saved?”.

- 90 The word is indeed used in a variety of ways, for instance, to accept (3:12), to believe in a person or in his name (Jesus – usually with εἰς or ἐν; also God – 5:24), to believe in objects like words or Scripture, not to entrust yourself (2:24) simply to believe (because of somebody’s word or signs).
- 91 See also Schenke (1998:131): ‘Gott gemäße Werke nur wirken kann, wer das eine und einzige Werk Gottes vollzogen hat, an seinen Gesandten zu glauben’. Keener (2003:677) points out that ‘rather than laboring for actual food... they should work for what the Son of Man would “give” them – the familiar sense of “giving” providing an image disjunctive with the familiar sense of “work”’. Although faith ‘opens a person up towards Jesus’, it sets a process in motion where the gifts of God through Jesus can be fully received.
- 92 Meeks (1993:15) is correct in remarking that, ‘Every map of a moral world depends heavily for its delineation upon the dark colors that are used to sketch in the enemies of virtue. What are the things that stand against our being good?’
- 93 See Metzner (2000) for a detailed treatment of this issue; Hasitschka (1989); Alison (1997: 83–102). For occurrences of the word ἀμαρτία see John 1,29; 8,21.24.34.46; 9,34.41; 15,22.24; 16,8.9; 19,11; 20,23; 1John 1,7.8.9; 2,2.12; 3,4.5.8.9; 4,10; 5,16.17.
- 94 ‘The good’ is one of the central concepts in metaphysics and practical philosophy. Cf. Höffe (1992:109). It is however used in many different ways and a single definition eludes description.
- 95 Cf., for instance, Epictetus (Discourses 1.4 – more or less the same period the Gospels were written): ‘He who is making progress, having learned from philosophers that desire means the desire of *good things* (ἀγαθός), and aversion means aversion from *bad things* (κακός); having learned too that happiness and tranquility are not attainable by man otherwise than by not failing to obtain what he desires, and not falling into that which he would avoid’.
- 96 The Stoics, for instance, narrowed down the meaning of ‘the good’. Forschner (1995:171) remarks: ‘Die Grundsatz... lautet: μόνον τὸ καλὸν ἀγαθόν, nur das sittlich Gute ist gut’. Earlier philosophers did not automatically link the good to morals, although there were some efforts to do that (172). For them the term still covered a wider semantic range. The Stoics, however, by linking καλόν and ἀγαθός drew the good into the ethical (political) sphere as *Strebenzielen* (172) that would result in happiness.
- 97 ἀγαθός is defined by Arndt, et al. (2000:ad loc.) in terms of quality as well as a high standard of worth and merit.
- 98 Arndt et al. (2000:ad loc.) define the term κακός as ‘being of low grade or morally substandard’ or ‘being relatively inferior in quality’.
- 99 Although some scholars like Bultmann thought that 5:28–29 might be a later addition, these verses form an integral part of the Gospel. See Van der Watt (1985:71–86).
- 100 The combination of both ἀγαθόν and ἀλήθεια with a verb of action (ποιέω) should be noted. Generally speaking ἀγαθός in Greek philosophy tends to be something you strive for and not what you do, while ἀλήθεια refers more to what really is, i.e. an accurate perspective on reality – cf. Köstenberger (2005:34). In most cases in Greek philosophy it would not be said that you ‘do’ good or truth. This prompted scholars to look elsewhere for the origin of this expression. Ibuki (1972:336) following De la Potterie, Haas et al.

(1994:26), as well as Harris (1994:68) argue that this is a Hebraism, since the reference to truth in Hebrew could be made with a verb of action.

- 101 Newman and Nida (1980:92) note that this is also a Semitism, like its corresponding phrase in 5:29.
- 102 Cf., for instance, the correspondence in themes: judgment (3:17,18 – 5:24,27); faith (3:18 – 5:24); mission of Jesus (3:16,17 – 5:23,24); eternal life (3:16 – 5:24); Son of God (3:18 – 5:25); obedience (3:21 – 5:25); good behavior (3:21 – 5:28); bad behavior (3:19,20 – 5:28).
- 103 Cf. Ibuki (1972:34off.) for a detailed discussion of these verses. Newman and Nida (1980:94) note that the works done 'in God' should not be interpreted spatially but relationally.
- 104 Beasley-Murray (1999:ad loc.) remarks: 'χάρις καὶ ἀλήθεια, "grace and truth," = the common **hesed we-emet**, frequently rendered in the LXX by ἔλεος καὶ ἀλήθεια to describe the covenant mercy of God (cf. Exod 34:6)'. Lindsay (1993:131-133) emphasizes the thematic link between Ex. 33-34 and John 1:14-18, which strengthens the argument that 1:17 echoes Ex 34:6. Kuyper (1964:3ff.); Köstenberger (2004:43). This contrasts with Bultmann's view, which denies such a direct connection.
- 105 Law and what is good are also indirectly related in 1:45-46, although in another way. The law witnesses to what is good. Theobald (1988:360-361).
- 106 Lindsay (1993:133) refers to the close connection between law and doing the truth. Ibuki (1972:204-205) makes the case that the main emphasis in 1:17 falls on 'truth' and not on the other words.
- 107 Lindsay (1993:134) is of the opinion the claim that that truth and the Torah stand in contrast needs qualification.
- 108 For an overview of the history of research during most of the last century see Ibuki (1972:1-27); Schnackenburg (1980:225-226); Burridge (2007:286).
- 109 Kuyper (1964:15) treats the difference between the Hebrew and Greek uses and note that applied to God truth in the Greek sense would emphasize the trueness of God against false Gods. In Hebrew the emphasis would be on the faithfulness and reliability of God. Compared to the Greek use that is more abstract, the Hebrew use focuses on the relational aspect expressed by faithfulness. Köstenberger (2004:34) maintains that this notion of God's faithfulness could be – and indeed was – revealed throughout the history of Israel, with the culmination in Christ.
- 110 See Brown (1972:1140); Lee (2004:280).
- 111 Newman and Nida (1980:497) prefer the latter. They offer the following translations: 'This expression may have several different forms, for example, "the Spirit who shows what is true about God" or "the Spirit who speaks the true words about God" or "the Spirit who will reveal what God truly is."' (506).
- 112 This dialogue may have its own dynamics – i.e. it must also be supervised. For instance, phases involving getting rid of prejudice/judgment, describing, comparing and contemplating, etc. may all be part of such a debate.
- 113 This is not to make the mistake of referential fallacy. It is acknowledged that the textual world does not necessarily reflect the real world, but it cannot be denied that the textual world is imbedded in the social dynamics of the situation in which it originated.
- 114 Miller (2004:6ff.) points out that the Decalogue was the foundation for the basic principles and norms shaping the rest of the legal material in the Old Testament. This may be seen in the order or structure of the Decalogue that is meant to bring together all that is important for Israel's life – religious, familial, social.

It moves from the fundamental requirements of Israel's relationship to God to the basic guidelines for life in community, he argues.

115 Kanagaraj (2001:33-60) discusses the presence of the Decalogue in the Gospel, although his argumentation tends to be a bit forced at certain points.

116 The most ancient authorities lack 7:53-8:11, which is commonly regarded as a later addition and therefore not part of the original form. Nevertheless there is a large degree of agreement that there is no thematic tension between this section and the rest of the Gospel. For a summary of the arguments see Beasley-Murray (1999:143).

117 There are textual variants that have the reference in 8:39 to God, the Father, and not to 'their father' (=the devil). See Metzger (1994:192).

118 Durham (1987:297-299) argues for this possibility. Miller (2004:15) draws attention to the following consideration, 'The commandment against coveting is by its very character the vehicle that opens up the Commandments as a whole to a broader understanding'.

119 See Tomson (1997:70) on the role of the law in Jewish societies in outlining social identity, both internally and externally.

120 Verhey (1984:142) aptly remarks, 'The law of Moses apparently still stands... John never discards or discredits the law... the refusal to come to Jesus is a refusal to... keep the law... The law still stands'.

121 The relationship between lawgiver and judgment underlies this remark. The lawgiver (normally the king in secular situations and in religious situations the [G]od) is judge precisely because he is the lawgiver. He is the giver of the law, knows what it means, and can therefore judge whether it is trespassed or not.

122 The different lines of thought in the rest of these discussions are highlighted below. *The first line deals with Jesus' position (identity):* Jesus witnesses about himself. He argues that his Word is truth and will set people free (8:34-36), since what he says comes from the Father (8:38) and is the truth (8:40). He knows the Father (8:55), who is also God (8:42,54), says what he has seen with his Father (8:38), and they honor one another (8:49,54). Anyone who therefore accepts Jesus' word – as he keeps the word of the Father (8:55) – will receive eternal life (8:51). *The second line deals with the position (identity) of the people talking to Jesus:* If they do not accept the words of Jesus, they are slaves of sin (8:34,37). Their deeds reveal their identity as children of the devil (8:44), since they want to kill Jesus (8:37,40). The basis of the argument that identifies them with the devil is that they do and want to do what they have heard from their father (8:38,41,44). They do not believe the truth (8:45,46) and are therefore not of God (8:47). *The third line deals with the misunderstanding.*

In 8:23 Jesus distinguished between himself and the people – he is not from this world while they are.

Jesus (indirectly) claims that these people are slaves and they deny it by claiming that they are children of Abraham (8:31-33). Jesus acknowledges that they are indeed Abraham's children on a physical level (8:37), but denies it again in 8:39-40 on the basis of their works. They are not acting like Abraham and therefore reveal that they are not really his children. This argument only makes sense on the basis of the presupposition that a child does what his father does. In 8:41 the people claim that God is their Father, but that is also denied by Jesus (8:42), again on the basis of their works. He identifies the devil as their father (8:44), since they act like him. These misunderstandings have to do with their identity based on their deeds. The people judge according to human standards – they think Jesus is arguing from a human point of view about slavery and childhood. Jesus introduces another dimension, namely the spiritual dimension. The slavery the people

are talking about is not the spiritual slavery Jesus refers to; neither is the type of fatherhood. They are emphasizing the physical fatherhood of Abraham but Jesus focuses on the spiritual fatherhood. He speaks the truth, because he judges from the perspective of the Father (8:15-16). There are two worlds that are contrasted here – the difference can be seen in the arena of physical deeds – and the basic deed that distinguishes between these two worlds is: choosing Jesus or not (8:39-42). Decision and Christology overlap.

- 123 Even though there was strong social and even religious pressure on an individual to obey his or her parents and live according to the traditions of the family, there were children who disobeyed their parents. Plutarch (*Mor.* 1.12a-d) encourages parents to supervise their children during adolescence, since they tend to act according to their impulses and do wrong things. Obviously disobedience was regarded as very negative, especially because it destabilized relationships within the family. Consequently severe punishments in some cases were prescribed and it could happen that the disobedient person's ties with the family were severed, although this did not seem to imply that the parent completely dissociated himself from his child. Within the family the opportunity to correct mistakes remained. This was possible through punishment, or simply resolving the problem through discussion. Josephus (*Ant.* 4.8.24 §264) indicates that if a child is 'cured' from his errant ways, he should be spared further reproach. Parents should not act in wrath if there is repentance. In this way the honor and harmony of the family could be restored. In the imagery of John 8 an ideal situation is suggested and the ability of the child to disobey is not actualized as part of the imagery. This illustrates the selectiveness of the imagery.
- 124 In commentaries the Johannine axiom (a child does what his father does) is usually simply restated without showing awareness of the evident problem Wengst (2001:328) raises, namely, that the premise of a son doing what his father does must be questioned, especially in the light of present-day experience. It is simply not true within today's social expectations, and therefore suggests another social ecology. The essence of this problem boils down to the distinction between description and explanation. To restate what one finds in the text is different from explaining it. This is illustrated in Malina's (1986) reaction to the article by Malherbe (1977:222-232), although in my opinion Malina was a bit over-critical. It should however be noted that within the ethos of John (the first century situation he is reflecting) the child was indeed expected to do what his father did.
- 125 The word ἐκ indicates *origin, or from where*. See BDAG.
- 126 Schnelle (1998:158) remarks that the concept of truth is Christologically loaded in John. However, it can only be Christologically loaded because Jesus comes from the Father, who is truth.
- 127 John only uses διδάσκω and derivatives and not παιδεύω and derivatives. In the light of 5:19ff. this teaching by the Father, which is later described with the verb διδάσκω, covers the same semantic field as παιδεύω and other derivatives in this Gospel.
- 128 How Jesus was taught, is not so important in the argument in Ch. 8, as the statement that that he was taught by the Father, is important. That might be the reason why the 'how' is not discussed. References to Jesus who has heard (the message/words) from the Father, which he again speaks to the world, represents a direct analogy to what was seemingly culturally accepted in the first century Mediterranean world (8:26 - καὶ γὰρ ἃ ἤκουσα παρ' αὐτοῦ ταῦτα λαλῶ εἰς τὸν κόσμον 8:28 - καθὼς ἐδίδαξέν με ὁ πατήρ ταῦτα λαλῶ 8:38 - ἐγὼ εἶώρακα παρὰ τῷ πατρὶ λαλῶ 8:40 - λελάληκα ἣν ἤκουσα παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ). Again the way in which the Father has

- spoken to Jesus or has taught him, is not in every aspect similar to the way earthly fathers do this. How the teaching takes place, is contextually (inter-textually) described, but also in metaphorical terms, for instance in 5:19-20, 30.
- 129 In antiquity the process of education involved learning by watching and listening. What Jesus saw the Father doing, he did likewise.
- 130 Waldstein (1990:311); De Boer (1996:97ff.); Loader (1989:76-77).
- 131 This serves as the basis for the education process. See 3:35 and Carson (1991:251).
- 132 Hearing, seeing and doing are not separated in this Gospel (cf., for instance, 5:19-20 with 5:30).
- 133 Obviously it is not implied that everywhere in the ancient world people educated their children like this and only like this. What is said here is that similar patterns of education were widespread in the ancient world. In any case, John himself gives the reader an indication of what he thinks takes place during the education of Jesus by the Father.
- 134 This involves a lot more than simply cognitively knowing God. Gnilika (1983:128) sees knowledge as 'Anerkennung und Ermöglichung der Gemeinschaft mit Gott'.
- 135 Both references to father in 8:38 could refer to God as father in which case *ποιεῖτε* is probably imperative mood. See Metzger (1994:192) and Newman and Nida (1980:282). It is also possible that the second reference to father in 8:38 could be to Abraham who is called their father in the immediate context. The implication of the remark is then that they are the children of Abraham and should behave like him. Although it is linguistically possible that both references to father in this phrase refer to God, Beasley-Murray (1999:134) – alongside most translations and commentators – distinguishes here between the two fathers and understands the latter to be the devil, also referred to in 8:44. In 8:38 we would then have the first vague reference to the devil as the father of the opponents. This seems to be the best choice and is accepted here. It would, however, not make a significant difference to the interpretation, since the implication of 8:41 within this context is in any case that they do the works of their father, implying that they have learned them from him. The only difference would be that this is then not an expressed reason as far as the opponents are concerned.
- 136 This is evident from the statement by the Jews in 7:15 that the knowledge of Jesus astonishes them (see also the remark of the officers in 7:46), also because they are not aware that he has studied with somebody significant (*πὺς οὗτος γράμματα οἶδεν μὴ μαθητικῶς*). Neyrey (1996:119) correctly points out that the question was whether a wise and respected teacher taught Jesus. That would have determined his position of honor in the eyes of the community. He quotes Menander Rhetor (*Treatise* II.371.17-372.2) to support this argument. Learners bore the stamps of their mentors and teachers: 'young men were only as good as their teachers and those who formed them in the social values enshrined in their past culture' (Neyrey 1996:120). It should also be noted that simultaneously teaching your child a vocation and giving him moral instruction or even another form of higher learning was, contrary to the rest of the ancient societies, completely compatible with the Jewish society (Anchor Bible Dictionary, ad loc.; Cf. for instance Paul in Luk. 18:3 or 1 Cor. 4:12). The remark by the Jewish opponents is ironic. They do not know who taught Jesus, although Jesus' knowledge makes it apparent that he must have had an important teacher, whom they were supposed to know. Jesus identifies his teacher as the one who has sent him, namely God (7:16ff. - 8:55). The honor he therefore seeks is not his own, but that of his teacher, the Father. It seems that the education of Jesus by



the Father includes not only vocational training but also specialized training in morals and further knowledge.

- 137 See also Plutarch (*The life of Marcus Cato* XX 4-7).
- 138 'From Homeric to historical times Greek society remained founded on the *oikos* or household, with the father's power therein almost unfettered. It was the business of the father to pass on the *oikos* to his son at least as strong as he had inherited it' (Roberts 1984:157). This implies a strong educational tradition.
- 139 See for instance *Tosefta Qiddushin* I, 11b where it is stated that the father has the following responsibilities towards his son: he must circumcise his son, must redeem him, he must teach his son the Torah, he must teach him a trade and must see that he gets a wife. Obviously, there were different forms of education. See Shelton (1988:104). A father could teach his son the basics of life, which usually included a trade and in the case of the Jews the Torah.
- 140 See for instance *Tosefta Qiddushin* I, 11b where it is stated that the father has the following responsibilities towards his son: he must circumcise his son, must redeem him, he must teach his son the Torah, he must teach him a trade and must see that he gets a wife. Obviously, there were different forms of education. See Shelton (1988:104). A father could teach his son the basics of life, which usually included a trade and in the case of the Jews the Torah. There were also possibilities, especially in Graeco-Roman cultural settings, to get a private tutor or to send your son or daughter to school (see Shelton 1988:109) – if you could not afford a private tutor – to be educated in music, gymnastics, etc. Nevertheless 'the Romans continued to cherish the ideal of the father as his son's teacher' (Shelton 1988:104). Plutarch (*The life of Marcus Cato* 20.4-7) could not conceal his admiration for Cato who did everything to educate his own son. In the case of Jesus the Father taught him his trade – giving life – and gave him the wisdom needed to be a Rabbi or teacher himself. This corresponds with teaching your son the Torah as well as his trade, as *Tosefta Qiddushin* I, 11b requires.
- 141 By metaphorically substituting Father for God, and Son for Jesus in 5:18-30, the analogy becomes possible.
- 142 This was an important way to transmit knowledge. Children were expected to carefully observe their parents and then copy them. See Shelton (1988:118). McGrath (1998:472) also points out that 'the subordination of sons to fathers was generally accepted in first-century Mediterranean cultures'. See also Dt. 21:18.
- 143 Johnson (1995:196) mentions: 'The transmission of wisdom from father to son is, of course, the standard *mise-en-scène* of parenesis'. See Roberts (1984:63).
- 144 This was not only the case in Jewish societies. Tacitus in his *Dialogus de Oratoribus* 28-29 emphasizes the thorough education that the parent should give his child. Syriac Menander (2.20) says that the child (son) should listen to the words of both his father and mother.
- 145 See Josephus *Ant.* 1.3.1 §72. In 1 Macc. 1:54-58; 2:15-28; 4:36-43 Mattathias confirms his and his son's loyalty towards the ways of their fathers. Dixon (1991:111) says that Roman children inherited the 'family name and honor and the obligations that go with them - the continuation of the family cult... the maintenance of the family traditions'.
- 146 A telling description of this practice is given by Josephus (*Ant.* 1.2.3, 68-69): 'He [=Seth] after being brought up and attaining to years of discretion, cultivated virtue, excelled in it himself, and left descendants who imitated his ways. These being all of virtuous character, inhabited the same country'
- 147 See Keil (1888:177). Christ (1984:10) claims: 'For its children the duty of religiously sanctioned obligations towards the parents corresponded to that of the relationships between men and gods'.

- 148 Roberts (1984:157) puts it quite clearly: 'The οἶκος and the father's position therein being the foundation of society...Any form of disrespect of parents was prohibited'.
- 149 Lassen (1992:249) stresses that children were legally bound to the authority and discipline of their parents in Roman societies. Malina and Neyrey (1991:29) again link the responsibility of the children to obey the father, thus upholding the honor and contributing to the shame of the family. If the child dishonors his or her father through disobedience, the whole social structure and position of the family are adversely affected. 'Obedience is a primary value in such a society (dyadic)... Obedience...quite adequately represents the very concept of embeddedness (in a group-orientated society)' (Malina and Neyrey 1991a:94).
- 150 Education did not only have economic value, but also served as way in which family tradition was protected and handed on from generation to generation. In 1 Macc. 2:15-28 (see also 1:54-58 and 4:36-43) it is described how Mattathias and his sons are asked to obey the king. Mattathias answered that he would rather stick to his own traditions and stay loyal to the covenant of his ancestors. From that passage the corporate effect of his decision is clear. Plutarch (*The Life of Marcus Cato* 20.4-7) tells with great care how Cato gave his son 'the opportunity at home to become familiar with his society's ancient customs and traditions' (Shelton 1988:105).
- 151 That it is probable that the idea of tradition is implied in 8:34-47 may be argued from several points, for instance, this section deals with behavior learned from their father as carrier of the tradition related to behavior; the opponents' father, the devil was the origin of their tradition for murder and hate and they follow him now; Abraham lies far back in history and therefore represents a figure whose traditions should be followed.
- 152 A switch in words from seed (σπέρμα - 8:33,37) to children (τέκνα - 8:39) might indicate the change in status. Seed might indicate their position as those who stand in the tradition of Abraham, while children might refer to their present physical status. They have actually left the family and their traditions and cannot claim to be children of Abraham, since they do not do what he asks. If this line of argument is plausible, this might be a subtle remark on the position of the Jews within the conflict with the Johannine group.
- 153 It must be noted that the fact that a child acts as his father does was not only due to the education of that particular child by the father. It was due to that person's bloodline too. Pliny the Younger (*Letters* 8.10) emphasizes that his children will be good politicians because they will have a long line of famous political ancestors.
- 154 In John's Gospel and Letters this term (ἐπιθυμία) is only used here (8:44) in John's Gospel, and twice in 1 John (2:16,17). In 1 John 2:16-17 it is used negatively for the desire, passionate longing or lust that is so typical of this world. It can be assumed that this should also be the way to understand it in John's Gospel. They lust for the negative things their father stands for.
- 155 See Golden (1990:102). Philo (*Dec.* 118) emphasizes that children have nothing of their own – their parents have supplied them with everything they have. A child should therefore not neglect his parents. Josephus (*Ant.* 4.8.24 §§260-264) also links the honor due to the parents to the loving care the parents have shown the children.
- 156 See Lassen (1992:248,254-255,258-259) on both the Roman and the early Judaistic situation and De Vaux (1974:20) on Ancient Israel. See also Schrenk (1973:949); Schrot (1979:512); Malina and Neyrey (1991:26); Gielen (1990:135); Christ (1984:10); Dixon (1991:131, 138); Rawson (1987:7); Shelton (1988:18).

- 157 See Philo (*Quod Deus sit Immutabilis* III.17-18).
- 158 Philo (*De Spec. Leg.* II.239f.) argues that it is not necessary to make laws which enforce filial affection. It is rather an imperative instinct. This echoes Epictetus (*Arrian's Discourses* Book II.xxii.15) who states: 'Human nature is to love nothing so much as one's own interests: this is father and brother and kinsman and country and God'. Cicero (*De Finibus* III.xix) explains the Stoic opinion that nature creates in parents an affection and love for their children. This is the 'core' of what a social community should be.
- 159 Philo (*Quod Deus sit Immutabilis* 17) remarks: 'If there are any whose every deed is self-seeking, who have no regard for the honoring of their parents... for the safety of their country... for the security of good custom... then miserable shall be their fate'. It must be remembered that this remark does not exclude all individuality. It rather describes a tendency. In terms of people living in the Ancient Near East 1000 years BC, people during the times of Christ could seem quite individually orientated. However, compared to modern European standards, the latter were predominantly group-orientated. See Roberts (1984:62); Malina and Neyrey (1991a:73); Dixon (1991:149).
- 160 Robinson (1981:30) observes about ancient Israel: 'The group possesses a consciousness which is distributed amongst its individual members'. He also applies this to Christianity (44).
- 161 In *Deus. Imm.* 17-18 Philo says that it means honor and glory to honor your parents or to secure good customs.
- 162 See Malina and Rohrbauch (1998) as example of material on these issues.
- 163 This was even seen as something natural. Dio Chrysostom (*Twelfth Discourse* 42) says that 'the goodwill and desire to serve which the offspring feel toward their parents is... present in them, untaught, as a gift of nature and as a result of acts of kindness received'.
- 164 See, for instance, Morris (1995:527); Brown (1972:471); Kruse (2003:269); Wengst (2001:63).
- 165 A survey of the approximately 25 ἀμὴν ἀμὴν-sayings in this Gospel (1:51; 3:3,5,11; 5:19,24,25; 6:26,32,47,53; 8:34,51,58; 10:1,7; 12:24; 13:16,20,21,38; 14:12; 16:20,23; 21,18) shows that the phrase ἀμὴν ἀμὴν a) always introduces important information by way of a short saying, b) that in virtually all the uses the ἀμὴν ἀμὴν-sayings build on what was previously said, implying that the use of this phrase does not introduce a new topic or a thematic break with the preceding theme, c) that in virtually all the cases the saying is developed further by expanding on the relevant topic. BDAG notes that in the LXX ἀμὴν is occasionally the translation for ἔγωγε, which is usually translated with γένοιτο. It is an 'asseverative particle, truly, always w. λέγω, beginning a solemn declaration but used only by Jesus.' John follows the double form also found in Num. 5:22; 2 Esdr. 18:6; Ps. 41:13; 72:19, which is mainly, according to BDAG used to strengthen a preceding statement in John.
- 166 The emphasis is indeed on productivity, as Brown (1971:472) also indicates.
- 167 Schnackenburg (1980:480-481) points out that the corn dying was often used in Rabbinic literature for eschatological resurrection.
- 168 I use *axiom* in the sense of 'a maxim accepted on its intrinsic merit'.
- 169 Although the conditional phrase of 12:24 is replaced by a participle the semantic function is equivalent.
- 170 What does hating one's life specifically imply?
- 171 The change in wording from ψυχὴ to ζωὴ indicates a change from physical to eschatological life. Ψυχὴ is used in this Gospel to indicate physical life, while ζωὴ is used for spiritual life with God (and is therefore a

- religious term in this Gospel). To hate one's life (ψυχή) in this world implies not putting one's own earthly existence and interests first. Brown (1972:467) defines it as 'physical life'. It can also mean 'one's self'.
- 172 Brown (1971:472) calls this a parable; see also Schnackenburg (1980:480).
- 173 Barrett (1978:423) speaks of 'a touch of allegory', but misses the point. What we have here is a substitution that is very common in this Gospel and is not based on allegory.
- 174 Ellis (1984:203) calls this a 'little parable'.
- 175 Hating one's life is described as 'nur auf die eigene Selbstverwirklichung aus sind' by Wengst (2001:64). Morris (1995:258) interprets hating one's life in terms of suffering while Brown (1972:475) sees it as the willingness to suffer and die like Jesus.
- 176 ψυχή is used in this Gospel to indicate physical life, while ζωή is used for spiritual life with God (and is therefore a religious term in this Gospel). To hate one's life (ψυχή) in this world implies not putting one's own earthly existence and interests first.
- 177 The slight change in wording between the two is perhaps a matter of emphasis. The pronoun [or referent] that comes first in the protasis is repeated in the apodosis: ἐμοί/ ἐμοί and τις/ αὐτόν.
- 178 This is perhaps the significance of the foot washing in Ch.13. If you want to be part of him, you should follow his examples and commandments.
- 179 Brown (1971:471) warns against allegorization.
- 180 Commentators such as Brown (1971:616) and Morris (1995:563) refer to the similarities between 10:11 and 13:37, thereby recalling the willingness of the shepherd to die for his sheep. It is however not an exact parallel, since Jesus is the good shepherd and Peter would not pretend to replace him. I think 12:23-27 is rather the background of what happens here.
- 181 The positive significance of giving one's life is also described in 15:13 where it is said that friends will give their lives for friends. This provides a social motivation for sacrificing one's life. However, in 13:36-37 this reason was not yet given, which means that the closely related 12:25f. serves as referential background for the 13:36f. narrative.
- 182 A full exegesis of this passage will not be offered. We will restrict our focus to the essentials for our argument.
- 183 Schnelle (1998:318-319) emphasizes the fact that it was precisely in the mode of the death of a martyr that Peter followed Jesus.
- 184 Schnelle (1998:318) is therefore correct in claiming that in 21:15-17 Peter is made the 'irdischen Stellvertreter Jesu'. He is now in a position of service; yes, he is in service of the flock of Jesus. That is where Jesus also is. Being with the flock means following Jesus.
- 185 Neyrey (1995:ad loc) argues for a strong link. His argument in general seems plausible, but borders on over-interpretation for instance when he links the hireling in Chapter 10 with Peter or where he interprets 10:1-5 in such a way that the shepherd is the Beloved Disciple. That is not the focus in that story at all.
- 186 Neyrey (1995:ad loc.) remarks: 'This Gospel labours to affirm that Peter finally becomes the group's shepherd.... Jesus himself acknowledges it as he invests Peter with the role and status of Shepherd of all the sheep...'. It is doubtful whether one must go so far in the interpretation as to make Peter the replacement of Jesus as shepherd. The text in 10:12-13 makes room for other relationships with the sheep. Jesus remains the Shepherd, and Peter the servant who tends to Jesus' sheep (note the possessive pronoun in each case where Jesus refers to his sheep – 21:15,16,17).

- 187 Witherington (2009:loc 263-269) approaches ethics as strongly linked and related to theology. These two aspects should not be separated. Such a remark of course depends on the definitions of ethics and theology, but in essence the point Witherington makes overlaps with what is argued here.
- 188 Witherington (2009:loc 701-711) also argues strongly against any form of a-historical treatment of the New Testament when dealing with ethical issues.
- 189 Hauerwas (1981:37-59) makes a strong point that a Christian moral framework cannot be prescribed in a secular society, since the particular way of structuring a worldview that corresponds with the Christian story is to be practiced and cultivated from inside that community. Without sharing the inner perspective, the required evaluation of reality and consequent actions may not make sense. Berger (1994:196ff.) pointed out that in light of the development of pluralist societies, traditions – implying choices and points of views that are simply taken as 'the way things are' – came under pressure and it is realized that any position is just one among a number of possible choices and commitments. In other words, traditions only exist within the confines of particular perceived mental worlds.
- 190 Such a point was reached with the words of Nietzsche in 1895: 'The Christian conception of God is one of the most corrupt conceptions of God arrived at on earth: perhaps it even presents the low water mark in the descending development of the God type' (Graham 2004:loc 673-680). Losing God in Christianity means ceasing to exist. This concept of God that Nietzsche offers should be discussed.

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